

GREEK
CULTURE
IN THE
ROMAN
WORLD

Zahra Newby

Greek Myths in Roman Art and Culture

Imagery, Values and Identity in Italy,
50 BC–AD 250



Greek Myths in Roman Art and Culture

Images of episodes from Greek mythology are widespread in Roman art, appearing in sculptural groups, mosaics, paintings and reliefs. They attest to Rome's enduring fascination with Greek culture, and her desire to absorb and reframe that culture for new ends. This book provides a comprehensive account of the meanings of Greek myth across the spectrum of Roman art, including public, domestic and funerary contexts. It argues that myths, in addition to functioning as signifiers of a patron's education or *paideia*, played an important role as rhetorical and didactic *exempla*. The changing use of mythological imagery in domestic and funerary art in particular reveals an important shift in Roman values and senses of identity across the period of the first two centuries AD, and in the ways that Greek culture was turned to serve Roman values.

ZAHRA NEWBY is Reader in Classics and Ancient History at the University of Warwick. She is author of *Greek Athletics in the Roman World: Victory and Virtue* (2005) and of numerous articles on Philostratus and Lucian, Greek cultural identity in the imperial period, as well as on mythological sculpture and sarcophagi. She also co-edited the volume *Art and Inscriptions in the Ancient World* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

GREEK CULTURE IN THE ROMAN WORLD

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For Oliver and Georgia

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Abbreviations

The abbreviations used follow the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, third edition, for classical authors and corpora of inscriptions and *L'Année Philologique* for journal titles, with the addition of those listed below.

ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> . Eds. W. Haase and H. Temporini. Berlin and New York, 1972–96
IGUR	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae</i> . Ed. L. Moretti. Rome, 1968–
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> . 8 vols. Zurich and Munich, 1981–97
LTUR	<i>Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae</i> . 6 vols. Ed. E. M. Steinby. Rome, 1993–9
LTURS	<i>Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae. Suburbium</i> . 5 vols. Ed. A. La Regina. Rome, 2001–8
NSc	<i>Notizie degli scavi di antichità</i>
PPM	<i>Pompei, Pitture e Mosaici</i> . 11 vols. Ed. I. Baldassarre. Rome, 1990–2003

Introduction: Greek Myths, Roman Lives

Greek myths saturated the Roman visual environment. From paintings and sculptures in houses and villas, to reliefs on sarcophagi, and the imagery on tableware and furnishings, myths surrounded ancient viewers. But why were they so popular? What needs did they fulfil, and what did they say about those who chose them to decorate their houses and tombs? This book aims to answer those questions. It is a book about the representation of Greek myths in Roman art, but it is also more than that. I use mythological images as a means to cast a broader look at the changing nature of Roman culture and society over the period considered here, roughly the mid-first century BC to the mid-third century AD. It is my contention that during this period Greek myths came to play an important role in changing discourses around social values and identities. The ways that myths were used in art can inform our wider understanding of the uses of Greek culture in Italy in this period, and also of the role of art in constructing and debating senses of identity.

Perhaps because of its omnipresence, for much of classical scholarship the taste for mythological imagery in Roman art seems to have been taken for granted, explained, if at all, as a sign simply of the Romans' desire to show off their classicising tastes. In his rebuttal of Cumont's complex eschatological readings of the images on Roman mythological sarcophagi, Arthur Derby Nock asserted that the primary significance of these themes, which he noted were also common in domestic art, lay in their dignifying allusion to classical culture:

[M]ythological scenes gave the context which the Muses as well as time had now hallowed: they had all the values of classicism.¹

The wider significance of those values, and what they meant to Roman purchasers and viewers, he left unexplored. So, too, in other areas of Roman art, mythological scenes in sculpture or paintings were traditionally seen

¹ Nock 1946, quotation at 163.

as part and parcel of the Roman taste for copies of Greek art-works.² Scholars interested in Roman art often chose to look at the types of art that were seen as specifically Roman – realistic portraits and historical reliefs – while mythological images could be seen instead as a continuation of the history of Greek art in Roman times.³ With the arrival of the twenty-first century the tide started to turn, with scholars now focussing on how classical forms and themes worked in their Roman contexts.⁴ Over the last two decades there have been a number of studies looking at the representations of Greek myths in Roman art, substantially changing our understanding of their uses and significance. Yet thus far these studies have been confined to particular genres of art, most notably Late Antique mosaics, mythological sarcophagi and Campanian wall-paintings.

Mythological sarcophagi have proven a particularly fruitful area for research, producing important studies such as those of Koortbojian, Zanker and Ewald, and Bielfeldt that move us on from the old stalemate between eschatology and classicism to a new understanding of the ways these images spoke out to their viewers through mythological analogies.⁵ Mythological paintings in Roman houses have also received important treatments, including Lorenz's 2008 monograph and a number of stimulating articles.⁶ Building on the work done by Schefold and Thompson in the 1950s and 1960s, these studies apply new insights gained especially from rhetoric and gender studies to look at the ways mythological images offered and debated paradigms of behaviour for their Roman viewers.⁷ In a similar vein Susanne Muth has looked at domestic mosaics showing

² For the historiography of attitudes to Roman 'ideal sculpture' see Marvin 2008. On paintings see Bergmann 1995.

³ For discussion of the problem see Brendel 1979. Early defences of the Romaness of Roman art can be found in Wickhoff 1900 and E. Strong 1907. On continuity see e.g. Toynbee 1934: 164–230 on sarcophagi; for more recent interpretations see Beard and Henderson 2001 and Zanker 2010: 1–47.

⁴ Much of the work has been on sculpture: Zanker 1974 provided a crucial basis; more recently see Gazda 2002; Perry 2005; Marvin 2008; Kousser 2008; Trimble 2011. For a review of the scholarship to that point see Kampen 2003. For studies of Roman viewing see especially Elsner 1995, 2007.

⁵ Koortbojian 1995; Zanker and Ewald 2004, English translation 2012; Bielfeldt 2005. See also the papers in Elsner and Huskinson 2011, especially Lorenz 2011, and further bibliography below, Chapter 6, n. 2.

⁶ Lorenz 2008; see also Hodske 2007 for a statistical analysis of mythological paintings in Pompeii. Other important contributions include Brilliant 1984: 52–89; Bergmann 1994, 1995, 1996; Trimble 2002; and Dickmann 2005.

⁷ Schefold 1952/1972; Thompson 1960, 1960–1; following important earlier work by Trendelenburg 1876.

Hylas and Achilles, arguing that they helped to construct social identities and explore gender relationships through the dream world of myth.⁸

Despite these excellent individual studies, a cohesive treatment that seeks to set the visual representation of Greek myths into its broader social and cultural contexts is still lacking.⁹ In this book I ask why Greek myths were so attractive to Roman patrons and viewers. It is only by asking ‘why’, and thinking about the other options that were not (or less often) taken, that we can fully appreciate the significance of the plethora of myths for our understanding of how Roman culture changed over this period, and the ways in which Greek myth, as Greek culture more generally, provided a wealth of material that was ‘good to think with’. In this book, then, I seek not just to look at the different contexts in which myths appear in Roman art, and the ways that they were used and viewed, but also to ask ‘why myth?’, and in particular, ‘why Greek myth?’

As recent scholarship has rightly noted, myths could provide paradigms for human lives, offering comparisons and, sometimes, ethical models to their Roman viewers.¹⁰ This is especially clear on sarcophagi, where the deeds and relationships of Greek heroes could be used to assert key Roman values such as *pietas*, *virtus* and *concordia*.¹¹ Yet there is a striking anomaly here that has not yet received the attention it deserves. Roman history already supplied plentiful examples of good virtuous behaviour that were specifically offered up as models for emulation.¹² Indeed, an oft-quoted line of Ennius made ancient customs and the example of past heroes the very basis of the Roman state: *moribus antiquis res stat Romana virisque*, ‘the Roman state stands by virtue of its ancient customs and its men’.¹³ Polybius declares that the practice of parading ancestor masks in elite funerals and listing the great deeds of the deceased and his predecessors

⁸ Muth 1998, 1999.

⁹ Some initial thoughts are given in Zanker 1999a. A number of works focus on myths in Greek art with only brief comments on their use in Roman art, e.g. Junker 2012: 110–19, 161–9; Giuliani 2013. Woodford 2003 is mostly concerned with how to identify myths in ancient art rather than with their meanings for the viewer. Lorenz 2016 will make a major contribution to this area, though with a different emphasis from here.

¹⁰ See especially Koortbojian 1995: 1–9 on the use of analogy. ¹¹ See below, Chapter 6.

¹² For an excellent introduction to the Roman use of *exempla* see Roller 2004; also Bell 2008.

¹³ Ennius 5.1. Skutsch 1968: 51–3; 1985: 317–18 suggests that the line related to harsh military discipline, and puts it into the mouth of the father of T. Manlius, who condemned his son to death for breaching military discipline (Livy 8.7.16). However, it seems to have been more widely quoted as a statement of the importance of ancient Roman customs: Cicero’s reference to it in *De republica* is cited by Augustine, *City of God* 2.21, and the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Avidius Cassius* 5.7 includes it in a letter of Marcus Aurelius as *omnibus frequentatum*, ‘much cited by all’.

was one of the central mechanisms by which Rome encouraged its citizens onto great deeds, while others attest to the exhortatory function played by images of the ancestors and annotated family trees in great houses.¹⁴ Livy's *History* and the compilations made by figures such as Varro and Valerius Maximus also diffused these models to the wider populace.¹⁵ If Roman history was already so full of models for good ethical conduct and the expression of key Roman values, why did houses and tombs become filled instead by images of Greek heroes? This is a central question that this book aims to address, and which I discuss in more detail in the Epilogue. It is a choice which suggests that the old models for the creation of Roman identity were losing their power, and that myth offered new and enticing possibilities which suited the changing nature of Roman society.

My discussion sits at the intersection of a number of different scholarly debates that are worth outlining here. The first, which has already been mentioned, is the scholarship on mythological images in art, which itself has sometimes formed part of the broader study of the influence of Greek art and artistic traditions in Rome.¹⁶ Second is the identification of 'myth' in the Roman context, and what we (and the Romans) mean by this; and third is the debate over the impact of Hellenic culture on Rome, to which my focus on mythological images is intended to contribute.

Defining Myth in a Roman Context

Myth is notoriously difficult to define, with inherent problems of circularity. Definitions have often mapped closely onto scholars' own theoretical approaches, such as a belief in an integral link between myth and ritual, or the utility of comparative studies.¹⁷ This has led many recent scholars

¹⁴ Polybius 6.53; Sallust, *Jugurthine War* 4.5–6; Pliny, *Natural History* 35.6–7; compare Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 2.1.10 and Seneca, *Controversiae* 10.2.16 for verbal retellings of the deeds of ancestors within the house to urge the young to emulate them. On the *imagines* see Flower 1996.

¹⁵ Livy, preface 10 and Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 1 preface both explicitly identify their desire to provide examples for imitation. For discussion see Chaplin 2000; Skidmore 1996; Lobur 2008: 170–207; Langlands 2008, 2011, forthcoming. Varro's *Imagines* is known only by name; it seems to have contained portraits and a brief epitaph for both Greek and Roman figures.

¹⁶ Further discussions of the scholarship can be found in the individual chapters below: sculpture in Chapter 2, painting in Chapter 4; funerary art in Chapters 5 and 6.

¹⁷ See Csapo 2005: 1–9, esp. 2–3 on the competing definitions offered by Harrison 1924 and Bascom 1965.

to question the usefulness of definition. Dowden and Livingstone trenchantly state: ‘We know a Greek myth when we see one and have need of no definitions, guidance, or code of practice to identify it as such.’¹⁸ Similarly, in his study of Greek mythography in the Roman world, Alan Cameron asserts:

by the Roman age there was one (by implication) universally accepted definition of mythology: a corpus of stories every educated person was expected to know. Greek mythology had become a central element in the literary culture of the age, Greek and Latin alike.¹⁹

This problem of definition plagues, in particular, the study of myth in Roman society. Both of the assertions quoted above are made in relation to the study of Greek myth, yet for the Roman world we are struck by the problem of deciding what category of material ought to be studied under the term ‘myth’. The traditional view of Roman religion, formed by scholars such as Georg Wissowa and Kurt Latte, was that the Romans lacked myths, in the sense of a series of complex genealogical stories woven around their gods and goddesses, such as those that circulated around the Greek Pantheon.²⁰ In antiquity too, this was identified as one of the differences between the Greeks and Romans, as observed by Dionysius of Halicarnassus at the end of the first century BC:

He (Romulus) rejected all the traditional myths concerning the gods that contain blasphemies or calumnies against them, looking upon these as wicked, useless and indecent, and unworthy, not only of the gods, but even of good men; and he accustomed people both to think and to speak the best of the gods and to attribute to them no conduct unworthy of their blessed nature.²¹

Yet this also seems a very narrow definition of Roman religion and culture. At around the very time that Dionysius was writing, Rome witnessed an outpouring of literature that can be seen as mythological – from the *Aitia* for various religious rites expounded in Ovid’s *Fasti*, to the tales of Rome’s legendary past collected in Livy’s *History*.²² One of the responses modern historians have made to Rome’s alleged ‘mythlessness’ is to redefine how we think of myth, moving away from definitions conditioned by studies of

¹⁸ Dowden and Livingstone 2011b: 3. ¹⁹ Cameron 2004: xii.

²⁰ Wissowa 1912: 9; Latte 1926. See also Rose 1950.

²¹ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 2.18.3, trans. E. Cary, Loeb Classical Library 319 (Cambridge, MA, 1937), 363. See, however, Borgeaud 1993, stressing that Dionysius is speaking specifically about myth’s role in religious cult and ritual, rather than in the wider culture.

²² As observed by Beard, North and Price 1998: 171–4. On the *Fasti* see Newlands 1995; Herbert-Brown 2002; Murgatroyd 2005; on Livy see Feldherr 1998 and Chaplin 2000.

Greek mythology to think instead about how myth might be understood in the context of Roman culture.²³

As these studies have shown, models based on the study of Greek myth, whether they are focussed on rituals and origins or adopt a structuralist approach to myth, are a bad fit for the Roman material, which, as Dionysius noted, does not conform to these norms. One response has been to rehabilitate Roman myth, seeking out ‘original’ Roman myths (such as the story of Romulus and Remus) and downplaying the role of the many myths of Greek origin which, as Cameron notes, were common currency in both art and literature.²⁴ Thus Nicholas Horsfall distinguishes between ancient Roman and Italian myths and what he describes as ‘secondary myth’, which he sees as largely the result of antiquarian activity.²⁵ This includes myths told about Roman and Italian pasts, places and rituals which can be seen as influenced by Greek culture and literature, as well as imported Greek myths. Yet this posits a clear divide between the two categories of material that seems untenable. Indeed, Horsfall himself acknowledges that ‘there never seems to have existed any perception that there might be a difference in kind or degree between the myths of Italy and those of Greece’.²⁶

Keeping the focus on distinctively Roman stories, but broadening the scope, Peter Wiseman’s *Myths of Rome* offers another approach, identifying myth as ‘a story that matters to a community, one that is told and retold because it has a significance for one generation after another’, allowing him to consider ‘historical, pseudo-historical or totally fictitious’ tales all as forms of myth.²⁷ Thus Wiseman asserts the crucial role that stories about the legendary figures associated with Rome’s past played in the construction of Roman values and identities.²⁸ He also argues against the idea that Greek myths came relatively late to the Roman thought-world, drawing attention to archaeological evidence that shows knowledge of Greece and Greek myths from the very earliest periods.²⁹ While Wiseman’s scope is broader than Horsfall’s, in allowing Greek myths a place in the construction of Roman myth, he too excludes the imported material from serious consideration. When the Greek Dionysus becomes the Roman

²³ See especially the papers in Graf 1993b and Feeney 1998: 47–75.

²⁴ Cameron 2004: 217–303 discusses the uses of Greek myth in Roman society and literature.

²⁵ Bremmer and Horsfall 1987: 1–11, esp. 1.

²⁶ Bremmer and Horsfall 1987: 6.

²⁷ Wiseman 2004: 10–11. See, however, Arena 2007: 375–6 for some problems with this inclusive definition of myth.

²⁸ Wiseman 2004: esp. 119–77.

²⁹ Wiseman 2004: 13–118. See also Wiseman 2008: 84–139 on bronze *cistae* with Dionysiac imagery.

Liber he fits into Wiseman's remit, but outside this the myths that reappear on floors, walls and in sculpture in the imperial period are excluded from consideration.

Wiseman's definition of myth is close to that suggested by Csapo, arguing the need for a functional definition of myth: 'Myth might be more usefully defined as a narrative which is considered socially important.' The way we can judge this social importance is through use: 'if it is important a story will be represented or alluded to frequently in social discourse'.³⁰ In an influential paper Mary Beard followed the lead of Roland Barthes, by looking at the 'mythic capacity' that other elements of Roman culture could have possessed.³¹ She suggested that Roman declamations can be seen as a form of cultural myth-making in the ways that they negotiated and debated the rules of Roman society, an argument which has been more recently pursued by Margaret Imber with reference to Roman *controversiae*.³²

Another set of narratives that feature prominently in Roman culture are the Greek mythological stories which are 'told and retold' in Roman art. Just like the stories studied by Wiseman, or the rhetorical texts analysed by Beard and Imber, these stories crop up again and again in sites of social interaction and self-representation, most notably the home and the tomb. Yet they have generally been passed over when looking for 'Roman myth'. As Denis Feeney noted, the struggles to re-identify the Roman in Roman myth generally leave the extensive Roman engagement with Greek culture to one side.³³ The implication often seems to be that Greek myth in Rome is not a matter for serious study, that rather than doing real cultural work in constructing and debating the values of society it is merely the result of antiquarian dabblings, literary embellishment or artistic borrowings. Feeney argues strongly against this view, suggesting that Greek mythology (and culture more generally) played important roles in Roman self-fashioning.³⁴ While Feeney's primary focus is on literature, many of the questions he asks about the ways Greek culture was used for the formulation of and debate about Roman identities and values can and should also be asked of the visual material.

The stories examined here are those which reappear repeatedly in paintings, sculptures and sarcophagi from the first few centuries of the Roman

³⁰ Csapo 2005: 9.

³¹ Beard 1993: esp. 63–4; Barthes 1970, see esp. 191–247 on mythology as a semiological system.

³² Beard 1993: 51–62; Imber 2008. See also Bloomer 1997.

³³ Feeney 1998: esp. 47–50. ³⁴ Feeney 1998: 67–70.

Empire.³⁵ They feature interactions between gods, heroes and mortals. Some come from narratives taken from epic cycles, particularly the Trojan War, but many more deal with erotic or violent subjects: doomed love affairs, seductions and violent deaths. They are set in a timeless world, separate from that of the present, though sometimes the separation between present reality and the mythological realm can be elided, and they include interactions between mortals as well as between mortals and gods. While the Roman stories of Romulus and Remus or Aeneas also fit this description, the myths that interest me in particular, and indeed appear most commonly in art of the imperial period, are those which come originally from the Greek world but were eagerly adopted in literature, theatre and art in Rome and Italy more broadly.³⁶

It is the Greek myths of Roman Italy which are my focus here, and whose deeper significance has often been overlooked in attempts to find a different sort of myth. What did these mythological images mean to viewers of the first centuries BC and AD, and how did they serve the needs of their Roman patrons and viewers? Readings of the uses of myth in Latin literature have shown that it can play a variety of roles; as well as offering the possibility for poetic artistry and sophisticated intellectual entertainment, myth also enabled the poet to universalise individual concerns, and to play out the concerns of contemporary society in a virtual, mythological world.³⁷ Marianne Hopman's recent analysis of Scylla also reveals the polysemous nature of myth, showing how a single mythological symbol encompasses a changing combination of different concepts and associations.³⁸ My aim is to subject art to the same sorts of analysis,

³⁵ For reviews of the themes popular in different genres of art see Neudecker 1988 on sculpture; Hodske 2007 on painting; Feraudi-Gruénais 2001 on tomb decoration; and Koch and Sichtermann 1982 on sarcophagi.

³⁶ The myth of Aeneas was, of course, also originally an external myth, turned to play a central role in constructions of Roman identity, especially from the time of Augustus onwards. For discussions of the origins of the myth see Bremmer and Horsfall 1987: 12–24; Gruen 1990: 11–16; 1993: 6–51. Erskine 2001: 15–43 analyses the role of the Julii in making the myth central to Roman identity. See also Schneider 2012 on the importance of Aeneas' Trojan origins. For discussion of the representation of Romulus and Aeneas in Roman art see Aichholzer 1983 and Dardenay 2010. On the overwhelming absence of Roman themes in Pompeian painting see Hodske 2007: 36–7.

³⁷ For examples relating to myth in Latin love elegy see Veyne 1988: 116–31 (esp. 117 on myth as 'learned entertainment'); Whitaker 1983 (myth as universalising personal experience); and Griffin 1985, esp. 1–31 and 112–41, arguing for elegy as a reflection of the concerns of contemporary society.

³⁸ Hopman 2012. Although Hopman considers text and image alongside one another for the Greek period, it is interesting that she omits discussion of the visual representations of Scylla

to see how mythological images reflect society to itself, and what this tells us about the changes in Roman identities and values.

It will be clear that among the many possible approaches to myth, I am clearly on the side of the functionalists rather than those looking for origins.³⁹ I am interested in what these myths do in their Roman context, and how they reflect and construct the values of that society. In his introduction to Greek mythology Graf suggests the following:

A myth makes a valid statement about the origins of the world, of society and of its institutions, about the gods and their relationships with mortals, in short about everything on which human existence depends. If conditions change, a myth, if it is to survive, must change with them.⁴⁰

A little further on he underlines this cultural relativity: ‘The cultural relevance of a myth varies with the social context in which it is narrated.’⁴¹ As I aim to show here, the converse of this is also true: the types of myths that are particularly prominent in a particular society reflect something about the nature and concerns of that society. It is this potential for the myths that appear repeatedly in Roman homes and tombs to reveal the concerns of Roman society that interests me. The iconographical choices made, and the contexts in which the images were viewed, will also affect our understanding of how they worked as a social discourse. This assumes a significance for myth, and for art, which has often been underplayed in past scholarship. Rather than seeing Greek myth in Roman art as ‘secondary’ and of little social importance, I wish instead to examine its serious role as one of the means by which Romans could debate and construct social values and identities.

The focus of this book is on how popular Greek myths were reformulated for their Roman contexts, and the new meanings they took on. Rather than seeing Roman identities as constructed only from sources that can be directly related to Rome’s history or culture (such as her legendary past, or declamations), important though both of these were, it explores how the Greek myths that appear on wall-paintings or sarcophagi came to play comparable roles, fulfilling a function that went much deeper than mere cultural ‘window-dressing’.

from the Roman period, furthering the notion that Roman visual reworkings of Greek myth are not worthy of study.

³⁹ For discussions of the scholarship on myth see Bremmer 1987; Graf 1993a; Csapo 2005; and Dowden and Livingstone 2011a, among others.

⁴⁰ Graf 1993a: 3. ⁴¹ Graf 1993a: 4.

Greek or Roman?

So far I have used the term ‘Greek myth’ to distinguish this material from the stories more clearly associated with the history and origins of Rome. But, of course, there are numerous overlaps, as well as inherent problems in the use of the very terms ‘Greek’ and ‘Roman’. The use of these myths in a Roman context can itself be seen as making them, in some sense, ‘Roman’. As Mary Beard asks:

How far is the re-writing of Greek culture in Rome part of a mythic tradition in its own right? . . . First, how far does the *re*-inscription of a Greek myth within a Roman context necessarily turn that myth into *Roman* myth – whatever its origin? Second, how far is Greece and Greek culture itself always already a Roman myth? How far is “Greece” in Rome necessarily “Roman myth”?⁴²

There is a distinction to be drawn here between origins and use, and also between the definitions used in scholarship and those which might have made sense to an ancient inhabitant of Italy. To a scholar of Roman culture anything that is produced or used in the Roman period and within the Roman Empire can in some sense be described as ‘Roman’. To describe these stories in Roman art as Roman myths is to draw attention to the different ways they were used and represented in their new Roman context.⁴³ Yet it is also important to ask whether their ancient viewers would have seen these stories as ‘Greek’ or ‘Roman’, and here the evidence is mixed. Stories of Greek heroes had long been familiar in Italy, and many of the events described in the epic poems of Homer and Hesiod were associated with the very landscapes of Italy itself.⁴⁴ Inhabitants of these areas may well have thought of these as being ‘their’ myths, rather than identifying them as specifically ‘Greek’. While the myths that appear on Roman sarcophagi or paintings are often those which are familiar to us from the works of the Greek tragedians – such as the tales of Medea, Hippolytus and Orestes – these tales had long been part of Roman culture too. Mythological themes were a staple of Latin poetry, as Juvenal famously complains; they were also portrayed on the stage and in the arena in the form of plays, pantomimes and gruesome re-enactments, as well as being included in mythographical handbooks such as those by Ps-Apollodorus (in Greek) and Hyginus

⁴² Beard 1993: 50 and n. 15, italics in the original. As Feeney 1998: 49 notes, she does not explore this question further in that paper, though some of the issues are discussed further in Beard 1996.

⁴³ These issues were insightfully discussed in relation to Roman art by Brendel 1979, esp 1–9.

⁴⁴ Phillips 1953; Wiseman 2004: 13–38.

(in Latin).⁴⁵ Many Greek mythological figures had also been transformed and absorbed into Roman culture and religion. Thus we find Marsyas as a symbol of liberation in the Roman Forum, or the figure of Hippolytus transformed into Virbius at the sanctuary of Diana at Aricia.⁴⁶

In other contexts, however, particular myths are clearly identified as the products of Greek culture. We have already seen how Dionysius of Halicarnassus characterises tales about the gods (many of which appear in our visual sources) as phenomena belonging to Greek religion, rejected by Romulus. Roman writers too could identify mythical tales as intrinsically Greek, contrasting them with chauvinistic assertions of the superiority of Roman historical or legendary models. Thus Valerius Maximus dismisses the myth of Theseus and Pirithoos as a model for friendship in favour of an example proffered by Roman history:

Let Greece talk of Theseus, how he trusted himself to the realms of Father Dis in support of Pirithoos' unlawful love, a tale told by liars and believed by fools. To see the mingled blood of friends, wounds clinging to wounds, death fastened upon death – these are the true tokens of Roman friendship, those the monstrous falsehoods (*mendacia*) of a nation prone to fabrication.⁴⁷

While Valerius does elsewhere use Greek myths as examples of some of the virtues he expounds, they are always put second to Roman examples, and clearly classified as *externa*.⁴⁸ There is also an implied contrast here between the proper sources of moral instruction in Rome (predominantly Roman history) and those utilised in Greece, which included myth as well as history or philosophical precepts.⁴⁹

When considering the visual representation of Greek myths we must consider the medium as well as the content of these images. Statues and paintings on mythological themes present their subjects through the use

⁴⁵ Juvenal, *Satire* 1.1–18. Hodske 2007: 34 notes that 41 per cent of the mythological themes in Pompeian paintings also appear in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. On 'fatal charades' see Coleman 1990; more generally on the interplay between myth and reality in Roman life see Coleman 2005. On mythography see Cameron 2004 (esp. 217–52 on the wider context) and Trzaskoma and Smith 2013, esp. Farrell 2013 on Ovid's links with mythography and Fletcher 2013 on Hyginus.

⁴⁶ On Marsyas see below, pp. 70–78. Hippolytus: Green 2007: 201–31.

⁴⁷ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 4.7.4, trans. D. R. Shackleton-Bailey, Loeb Classical Library 492 (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 419.

⁴⁸ E.g. Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 5.4 (ext) 1 (Perus and Mycon), 4 (Cleobis and Biton). For similar comments about the superiority of Roman historical *exempla* over those from other cultures see Livy, preface 10.

⁴⁹ See comments of Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 12.2.29–30. On myth as a means of instruction in Greece see Strabo, *Geography* 1.2.8. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 2.18–20 is more scathing, though he acknowledges that myth can offer useful parallels to explain and console.



Figure 0.1 Detail of marine scene from the so-called Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus; Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlungen. Glyptothek inv. 239.

of the styles of classical or Hellenistic art, often to the extent that older scholarship was dominated by the search for the Greek originals that were thought to have preceded them.⁵⁰ It is clear that they belong to a different visual idiom from historical reliefs or sacrificial scenes. The reliefs of the so-called Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus show the contrast well.⁵¹ Three sides were decorated with a Hellenistic-style frieze showing the marriage of Poseidon and Amphitrite (fig. 0.1), while the fourth has a very ‘Roman’-looking relief showing a censor sacrificing (fig. 0.2). The different styles correspond to different realms – the mythological and the human. Asking whether the style of the marine scene marked it as particularly ‘Greek’, or

⁵⁰ Bergmann 1995; Marvin 2008.

⁵¹ There is a wealth of bibliography on this monument: e.g. Kähler 1966; Torelli 1982: 5–25; Kuttner 1993. Gruen 1993: 145–52 gives a useful overview. The fact that two different types of marble are used in the reliefs may indicate that the marine scenes were reused *spolia*: Kuttner 1993: 199–200.

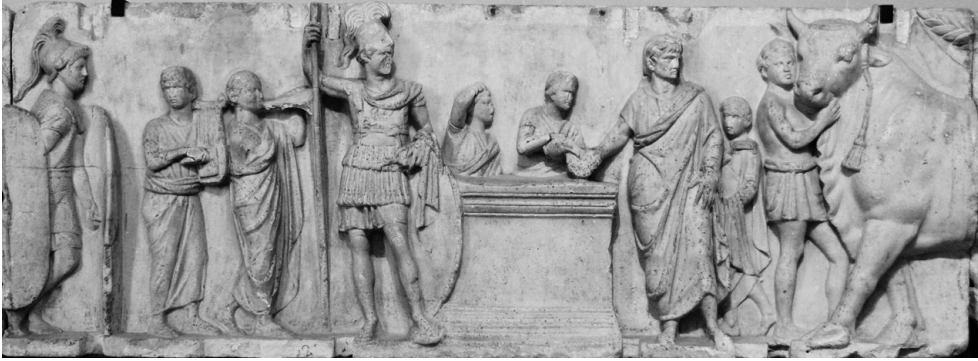


Figure 0.2 Detail of sacrifice scene from the so-called Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus; Paris, Louvre inv. 975.

rather as ‘mythological’, may be setting up a false distinction. As Tonio Hölscher has shown, different stylistic registers in Roman art carried with them associations with different values and subject matter.⁵² Style and content go together, and cannot easily be disentangled. In certain cases, however, the Greekness of mythological images is clearly signposted. The *Odyssey* landscapes from the Esquiline advertise their Greek lineage through the inclusion of Greek name labels for the individual figures, while mythological figures also appear in the paintings accompanied by Greek epigrams in the ‘House of Propertius’ in Assisi and the House of the Epigrams in Pompeii.⁵³

All this shows the difficulties in drawing a clear divide between Greek and Roman myth. Greek myths fed into Roman myths from the very start, but while some were transformed to form part of Roman or Italian history, others kept a clearer sense of their Greek origins and nature. In his excellent discussion of myth, Feeney draws an analogy between the Roman adoption of Greek mythic culture and that of other Greek states. Just as other states brought their own local myths with them, or adapted Panhellenic myths for their own ends, so too did Rome, though in their case they were outsiders laying claim to an ‘alien patrimony’.⁵⁴ Indeed, even though this model of local and Panhellenic myths might have been expected to lead to an elision of the boundaries between Roman and

⁵² Hölscher 1987, 2004. See also Hölscher 2006 and Elsner 2006: 274–5 on the problems of determining whether a model automatically carries its past with it.

⁵³ *Odyssey* landscapes: Biering 1995; O’Sullivan 2007; Assisi: Prioux 2008: 65–121; Squire 2009: 249–75; House of the Epigrams: Bergmann 2007; Squire 2013b, all with further bibliography. Greek is also the language for the *Tabulae Iliacae* recently studied by Squire 2011.

⁵⁴ Feeney 1998: 66.

Greek, Feeney stresses that it did not. The Romans, he claims, insisted on maintaining the sense of distance, of signalling myths as ‘Greek’, and in playing off against this other culture their own ideas of themselves.⁵⁵ The problems we encounter in defining myth in Roman culture as either ‘Greek’ or ‘Roman’ are a result of the paradoxical position of Greek culture in general in Rome, both as an element whose absorption is part of Roman identity, and as one that offers a foreign ‘other’ against which to define oneself.

Names are an important way of signalling cultural identities. In Greek and Latin texts, the same goddess was called respectively Artemis or Diana. For the sake of consistency, and in line with the borrowed ‘Greek’ artistic visual language in which the images discussed here are presented, in this book I have generally chosen to refer to mythological and divine figures through latinized versions of their Greek names (Heracles, Dionysus), rather than using the Latin equivalents, unless paraphrasing a particular Latin text, or dealing with a religious context where a god was worshipped in his or her Roman form (e.g. Mars and Venus). This merging of Greek and Latin acknowledges the Greek origins of these mythological figures, as well as their adaptation into Roman culture.

Hellenic Culture and Rome

The question of definitions leads us onto the broader question of Rome’s interactions with Hellenic culture. This is a topic that has been extensively discussed, especially with regard to the Republican period. While aspects of Greek culture can be traced earlier, Rome’s conquest of the Greek east in the third and second centuries BC is seen as a crucial moment for the Hellenisation of Rome, a time in which allegiances to Greek cultural values could be seen both as a way to engage with the newly conquered provinces and as playing an important role in the creation of Rome’s own self-identity.⁵⁶ Indeed, a number of studies have shown the ways in which attitudes to and uses of Greek culture lie at the heart of Roman attempts to define themselves.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Feeney 1998: 64–70; see also 123–33 on how this works in Ovid’s *Fasti*.

⁵⁶ Zanker 1976. See Ferrary 1988 on the politics of Roman philhellenism, and Gruen 1990 and 1993 on the ways attitudes towards Greek culture played a defining role in Roman power and self-definition. See also E. Rawson 1985 on intellectual culture and the studies collected in the special issue of *HSPH* 97 (1995), *Greece in Rome*.

⁵⁷ Gruen 1993; Wallace-Hadrill 1998b, 2008a; also Feeney 1998.

Yet what do we mean by ‘Roman’? This is the question asked by Emma Dench, who examines how the intrinsic plurality of Roman society was negotiated and represented in literary texts.⁵⁸ From the very start the population of Rome was believed to be a product of a mix of ethnic groups, while over time Roman citizenship was granted to the inhabitants of Italy and then to those from the wider Empire.⁵⁹ The city of Rome housed an ever changing population of both citizens and non-citizens, while the citizen body could also include those resident elsewhere. Definitions of Roman identity were constructed and negotiated in response to this pluralism, and the cultural life of Rome was affected by the broadening nature of its population.⁶⁰ By the end of the Republic we find the concept of a unified Roman Italy in which Italy can act as a model for political integration, and as the hinterland for Rome.⁶¹

The cultural influences on Italy during the last few centuries BC have been extensively studied. Italian communities were affected both by the spreading power of Rome and by their long-standing contacts with Greek culture, especially in the south, as well as through experiences in Rome’s foreign campaigns.⁶² Models of influence that seek to separate out the Romanisation and Hellenisation of Italy are too stark, as Wallace-Hadrill has shown.⁶³ Instead the two went hand in hand:

‘Hellenisation’ and ‘romanisation’ are not sequential, but two closely interrelated aspects of the same phenomenon.⁶⁴

For Wallace-Hadrill, the process of cultural change can be likened to the phases of circulation of the blood: aspects of Hellenic culture are drawn into the centre, then pumped back out again, in a transformed ‘Romanised’ form.⁶⁵ This model shows how cultural change is a continual

⁵⁸ Dench 2005.

⁵⁹ The classic discussion of citizenship is Sherwin-White 1973; for a wider discussion including the cultural implications see Dench 2005: 93–151.

⁶⁰ Noy 2000; Morley 2003; Edwards and Woolf 2003.

⁶¹ On changing ideas of Italy see Dench 2005: 152–221.

⁶² A number of recent volumes have picked up the issues raised earlier in Zanker 1976, e.g. Keay and Terrenato 2001: 1–110; van Dommelen and Terrenato 2007; Gardiner, Herring and Lomas 2013: 11–111. Prag and Quinn 2013 stress the interactions of cultures throughout the western Mediterranean. On Punic influences see esp. Erskine 2013 and Kuttner 2013. Osborne and Vout 2010 also comment on the need to acknowledge the important influence of Egypt on Rome and Italy, recently addressed by Mackenzie 2011 and Swetnam-Burland 2015.

⁶³ See the excellent discussion in Wallace-Hadrill 2008a: 3–37.

⁶⁴ Wallace-Hadrill 2008a: 26.

⁶⁵ Wallace-Hadrill 2008a: 27, 360–1; cf. Kousser 2008 for similar conclusions on the Aphrodite of Capua statue type.

process, with Rome herself influenced by external forces and passing that influence on to others. Indeed, as others have noted, it is a remarkable fact that some of the most defining features of Roman culture can be seen as the products of figures from the margins of the Roman world. Thus Ennius, a key founding figure of Latin literature who is often cited by others as a fount of opinion on matters of Roman values, was originally of Messapian stock, from the Hellenised south of Italy. Proud of his acquired Roman citizenship, he is nevertheless shown by Aulus Gellius as preserving his native and Greek identities alongside his Roman one.⁶⁶

The result of all this scholarship is a greater understanding of the ways in which a Roman cultural identity was created out of and in response to external influences, including Greece, other areas of the Mediterranean, and the Italian communities who came to form part of a wider Rome. It suggests that by the time of Augustus we can see Roman Italy as sharing in a common culture, though there were still regional variations and assertions of local interests.⁶⁷ The images I discuss in this book come from both the city of Rome and the cities and villas of Campania, especially from Pompeii. Certainly there are sometimes differences in the expression of values between these two areas, Campania having a closer connection to Greek culture through the presence of the Greek city of Naples, while Pompeii itself was also imbued with elements of Oscan, Samnite and Etruscan cultures.⁶⁸ Yet it is also clear that by the Augustan period Pompeii shared in the wider cultural concerns of Rome, as can be seen in the Building of Eumachia with its echoes of Augustan monuments at Rome.⁶⁹ Elite individuals also travelled regularly between Rome and Campania.⁷⁰ While Campania could sometimes be signalled as different from Rome, there are also shared patterns in the concerns and values that are articulated by mythological images.

Much of the study of Rome's cultural transformations has focussed on the last few centuries BC and has seen Augustus as both a culmination and a turning point.⁷¹ Indeed, Wallace-Hadrill's *Rome's Cultural Revolution* sees

⁶⁶ Ennius (ed. Skutsch 1985) fr. 525: *Nos sumus Romani qui fuimus ante Rudini*, 'we are Romans who were once Rudians'. Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 17.17.1 talks of Ennius' three hearts, from his ability to speak Greek, Oscan and Latin: Skutsch 1985: 749–50. See discussion in Wallace-Hadrill 2008a: 3–4; Aulus Gellius' interest may also be coloured by second-century AD interests in multiple identities, on which see Whitmarsh 2010.

⁶⁷ See Wallace-Hadrill 2008a: 73–143. ⁶⁸ Wallace-Hadrill 2011.

⁶⁹ On Eumachia see Cooley 2013: 31–6. ⁷⁰ See especially D'Arms 1970.

⁷¹ The idea that Augustus marked a turning point in Roman history owes much to Syme 1939. For responses to Syme's work, broadening the scope into religious and cultural life, see Millar

Augustus' Principate as a pivotal moment in which Roman values and identities are reasserted and redefined, portrayed as resting on a revival of older traditions which, however, owes much to Augustus' patronage and power.⁷²

Augustus, in achieving a sort of consensus, one which allowed continuing expansion of the citizen body, and continuing penetration of the elite from the margins, was able to establish a sort of consensus about what Romans were like, how they behaved, what their cities were like, what customs and rituals they followed.⁷³

Other studies too have seen Augustus' regime as a defining moment in the process of reforging Roman identity, with parallels in both art and literature. The canonisation of Rome's founding myth in Vergil's *Aeneid* is paralleled in Roman art, while the stress on Roman historical and legendary figures as a source of moral *exempla* in Livy's *Histories* is echoed by the line-ups of past heroes in Augustus' Forum.⁷⁴ Wallace-Hadrill's analysis of how power and knowledge shifted from old aristocratic families to antiquarians promoted by Augustus has resonances in other areas too. Collections of examples from the past, such as Varro's and Atticus' *Imagines*, were followed by Valerius Maximus' *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, a compendium of examples that opened up knowledge of moral *exempla* to a much broader sector of society than the old patrician families who had previously laid claim to them.⁷⁵

Yet as Osborne and Vout have noted, Wallace-Hadrill rarely goes beyond Augustus to tell us what the new post-Augustan culture looked like and how it developed.⁷⁶ While Dench includes analysis of post-Augustan texts in her examination of Roman self-identities and recognises the gradual widening of Roman citizenship over this period, she does not draw any conclusions about how and why Roman identities of the reign of Hadrian were different from those forged under Augustus.⁷⁷ It is easy to get the impression that Augustus set the tone for the rest of the first and

and Segal 1984; Raaflaub and Toher 1990; and esp. Habinek and Schiesaro 1997 (with programmatic statement by Wallace-Hadrill 1997).

⁷² See especially Wallace-Hadrill 2008a: 211–312 and 441–54.

⁷³ Wallace-Hadrill 2008a: 454–5.

⁷⁴ Key accounts are Zanker 1988 and Galinsky 1996. See also Pollini 2012. On Livy see Chaplin 2000. Augustus' Forum is discussed further below, pp. 58–63.

⁷⁵ Bloomer 1992: 1–4, 255–9 and Skidmore 1996: 53–82 differ over whether Valerius Maximus' purpose was largely rhetorical or ethical, but both see him as a resource for a broader section of society than simply the elite.

⁷⁶ Osborne and Vout 2010: 244–5.

⁷⁷ Dench 2005: 117–51 on citizenship. See also Wallace-Hadrill 2008a: 450–4 on citizenship under Augustus.

second centuries AD, and that nothing much then changed in Roman self-definition. This is striking when we consider both that it is acknowledged that Greek culture played a key role in formulations of Roman identities in the earlier period, and that it is widely recognised that there was a burgeoning awareness of Greek culture and the Greek past from the later first century AD, often referred to as either the ‘Greek renaissance’ or, with reference to the new revival of epideictic oratory, the ‘Second Sophistic’.⁷⁸

There have been several excellent studies of what this interest in the past, and the realities of Roman rule, meant for communities in the eastern Mediterranean and their senses of identity, but much less study of its impact on discourses on values and identities back at Rome.⁷⁹ While there have been studies looking at the role of Hellenism in imperial policy, we are still lacking a cohesive study of how Greek culture fed into constructions of Roman identity in this period.⁸⁰ By the second century terms such as ‘Roman’ and ‘Greek’ have become much more blurred, when we find eastern provincials such as the Athenian Herodes Atticus and the Quintilii brothers from Alexandria Troas reaching the consulship.⁸¹ Others have looked at the multiple identities expressed by figures from the eastern provinces, but there has been much less exploration of how the plurality of Roman society, and the openness of the elite to outsiders, shifted the terms of debate around ‘traditional’ Roman values and identities back in Rome.

Yet there is a growing awareness that the ‘consensus’ on Roman identity that Wallace-Hadrill identified under Augustus did face changes and challenges in the subsequent decades and centuries. In particular, Alston and Spentzou’s *Reflections of Romanity* identifies a profound sense of unease in the Latin texts of the later first century and early second century AD, which suggests a challenge to the model of communal Roman identity forged under Augustus in the works of Livy and Vergil.⁸² In this book I want to explore further how Roman society sought out different models for behaviour and values, through a focus on the images with which people

⁷⁸ Walker and Cameron 1989. For discussions of the Second Sophistic in relation to oratory and literature see Bowersock 1969, 1974; Bowie 1970; G. Anderson 1993; Swain 1996; Whitmarsh 2001.

⁷⁹ See e.g. Alcock 1993, 2002; Goldhill 2001a; Whitmarsh 2010; Gangloff 2013. Ostenfeld 2002 and Borg 2004 are dominated by the Greek side, though see Eriksen 2002. Newby 2005: 21–140 looks at the ways Greek athletic culture was used in the construction of Roman identities.

⁸⁰ E.g. Bowersock 1965; Boatwright 1987: 2002–12; 2000; Alcock 1993.

⁸¹ For useful discussions of the problem of multiple identities see R. R. R. Smith 1998; Salmeri 2000; Goldhill 2001a; Preston 2001. On Herodes Atticus see Tobin 1997 and M. Gleason 2010. See also Whitmarsh 2010 on microidentities.

⁸² See Alston and Spentzou 2011: esp. 1–9 on the problem. See further Epilogue.

surrounded themselves in life and death. Recent research on the Roman domestic sphere has shown the paramount importance of the house as a stage for self-representation and the construction of social values and identities.⁸³ The tomb too was a lasting memorial presenting an enduring picture of the deceased and his family. Inscriptions and images on the exterior cried out to passers-by to remember the dead inside, while the internal decoration exerted its effect on a more intimate audience, made up primarily of family members.⁸⁴ In both of these areas mythological images came to play a dominant role. There is a striking mismatch here between literary and rhetorical assertions of the overriding importance of the Roman past as a source of moral and ethical *exempla* and the intense interest in Greek mythological figures, rather than Roman historical ones, in the visual sphere, particularly in domestic and funerary contexts. If part of the Augustan consensus was that Roman identity rested, in part, on the heroic figures of her past, why did Roman houses and tombs come to be covered instead with the lovers, heroes and tragic figures of Greek mythology? I believe that this mismatch tells us something fundamental about the changing nature of Roman society, and the roles that Greek culture continued to play in constructing Roman identities in a changing world.

Questions and Parameters

The focus of this study is on images from Rome and Campania from roughly the mid-first century BC to the mid-third century AD. The destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum has left extensive material in the form of mythological wall-paintings whose original viewing contexts can often be reconstructed, while workshops in and around Rome were major producers of Roman mythological sarcophagi.⁸⁵ Free-standing sculptures are more dispersed, and often harder to recontextualise, though both Campania and Latium have yielded important finds.⁸⁶ Though there were sometimes extra resonances to some of the myths displayed in the area of

⁸³ The literature is extensive. Important early work was done by Wallace-Hadrill 1988, expanded in Wallace-Hadrill 1994; see also Clarke 1991; Hales 2003; Zarmakoupi 2014. On the role of mythological art in constructing images of patrons see especially Muth 1998, 1999; Trimble 2002.

⁸⁴ On the tomb as a place of self-representation analogous to the house see especially Hope 1997 and Wallace-Hadrill 2008b.

⁸⁵ I do not here discuss the Attic or Asia Minor sarcophagi, though some were imported into Rome. For an insightful comparison of the Hippolytus theme on Attic and Roman sarcophagi see Ewald 2011.

⁸⁶ On contexts see the crucial work of Neudecker 1988.

Campania (in which some episodes were said to have actually occurred), there is enough overlap to suggest a set of shared social values and interests between Rome and Campania. Despite the potential material to be found in smaller works such as silverware, lamps and furnishings, the desire to contextualise these images as much as possible has led me to focus on large-scale imagery, predominantly in the form of paintings, sculptures and reliefs.

The chronological boundaries are set by my interest in tracing what happens to the Roman engagement with Greek culture after the pivotal period of the Late Republic and the rise to power of Octavian/Augustus. The end point is dictated by a number of factors. The Severans witnessed the last flowering of the Second Sophistic with its revival and re-experiencing of Greek culture.⁸⁷ This imperial family, with roots in both North Africa and the Near East, well expresses the cultural diversity of the Roman political elite by this time, and its use of elements of Greek culture as a form of shared cultural language. While classicism remains important in later periods, it is also different, and needs to be seen against new contexts, such as the rise of Christianity. The mid-third century also witnesses what has usually been termed in English ‘demythologisation’, after the German term *Entmythologisierung*. The use of mythological themes on sarcophagi changes, and gradually disappears.⁸⁸ While Greek myth continues to play a vibrant role in other visual contexts into late antiquity, it raises a different set of questions and contexts to those explored in this book.⁸⁹

Even with these limits the material is extensive. Rather than providing a comprehensive overview I have sought instead to use individual examples to illustrate some of the broader ways in which mythological images were used to debate and construct social values and identities. It is my contention that an examination of the use of mythological images can help to answer questions about the changing concerns of Roman society from the mid-first century BC to the mid-third century AD. Yet what parts of Roman society do they give us access to? Terms like ‘Roman’, ‘Greek’, ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ are of course notoriously difficult to define,

⁸⁷ See the studies collected in Swain, Harrison and Elsner 2007. On Philostratus’ work as a conscious response to changes in the culture around him, see Swain 2009.

⁸⁸ See Zanker and Ewald 2004: 253–66; Borg 2013: 177–8; and Borg 2014 for discussions.

⁸⁹ See Leader-Newby 2004: 123–71 on myth and *paideia*. On myth in Christian literature see Graf 2011; for a reassessment of pagan culture in late antiquity, see Cameron 2011, with responses in Lizzi Testa 2013, esp. Agosti 2013 on classicism and *paideia*.

and indeed definitions can often restrict as much as they assist.⁹⁰ For my purposes Rome is both a place and a concept, and its inhabitants were more than just those with Roman citizenship.⁹¹ The art-buying public could span a variety of different sections of society, including rich foreigners as well as Roman citizens, well-off freedmen and merchants as well as knights or senators. A number of recent works have sought to shift attention away from the elite, in favour of ‘ordinary Romans’.⁹² Yet it remains difficult to know where exactly we should draw the dividing lines. Art was viewed by an even broader sector of society than those with the wealth to commission it, and its reflections of values and identities had an impact on these people too. Such individuals could bring to mythological art their experiences of viewing mythological scenes elsewhere, such as the theatre or arena, spectacles that were accessible to all.⁹³

Emanuel Mayer has recently made a provocative case for discerning a specific category of ‘middle-class’ art. He sees the very categories of art that make up a substantial part of this book, mythological paintings in Pompeian houses and mythological sarcophagi, as expressing particularly ‘middle-class’ values.⁹⁴ While acknowledging that there are some overlaps in iconographical types, Mayer posits a clear divide between elite and middle-class uses of mythological imagery. For him, middle-class art is firmly anti-intellectual, and works in a very different way from that of the elite:

[W]hile educated members of the Roman *nobilitas* had playfully used mythological wall painting in their villas to reference their cultural interests, members of the Roman middle classes often reinterpreted these images to suit more idiosyncratic representational tastes.⁹⁵

For the elite, myth is about *paideia* and intellectual display, whereas for the middle class, Mayer argues, myth had a more targeted use in the expression of emotional values. For Mayer, the flexibility of mythological images on sarcophagi, which allows them to serve as *exempla* of loss, pain and love, appears as evidence of a lack of understanding among middle-class buyers. The elite, we are told, would understand the full resonances of

⁹⁰ The bibliography on concepts of culture and identity is extensive. For some recent critiques with earlier bibliography see Hölscher 2008; Hales and Hodos 2010; and Gruen 2011.

⁹¹ For the multicultural nature of Rome see Noy 2000 and Edwards and Woolf 2003.

⁹² Clarke 2003; see also L. H. Petersen 2006 on freedmen, Mayer 2012 on the Roman ‘middle class’ and the essays in de Angelis et al. 2012.

⁹³ See Horsfall 2003a: 48–74 on the Roman plebs’ knowledge of Greek myths. On myths in the arena see Coleman 1990.

⁹⁴ Mayer 2012: 100–212. ⁹⁵ Mayer 2012: 7.

these myths and thus see them as inappropriate in a funerary context; the middle class did not, and could take their experience of playful theatrical reinterpretations of myths into the funerary context.⁹⁶

Yet, as several reviewers have noted, there are a number of problems with Mayer's readings.⁹⁷ His definition of middle class seems to vary from chapter to chapter. While in the earlier chapters this group is defined through its commercial character, by [Chapter 4](#) it seems to encompass everyone outside a very narrow political and senatorial elite, meaning that any sarcophagi except for the few firmly identified as belonging to senatorial families can be taken as expressing 'middle-class' ideals. Yet there are also difficulties in identifying the ownership of sarcophagi, with definitive evidence for their ownership very limited.⁹⁸ Sarcophagi without inscriptions might have been displayed inside a family tomb whose ownership was made clear on the outside. While it is certainly true that some among the political elite chose to celebrate their careers on their tombs, many other members of their families may have been honoured instead with mythological scenes, as we know to be the case for Maconiana Severiana, for example.⁹⁹ Mayer sees the change in stress between mythological and non-mythological sarcophagi as one of social class; I would argue instead that it shows a change in social values, and can also reflect gender roles. Whilst a political career remained an important statement of prestige for some, mythological scenes could also serve others within the same social group as reflections of a different set of values.

Mayer's view of the political elite sees them as unchanging, concerned to celebrate 'one's glorious ancestors, who, exceptions notwithstanding, had to conform in no uncertain terms to a clearly defined catalog of virtues – both in public and within the *familia*'.¹⁰⁰ I suggest, instead, that the makeup of the Roman aristocracy had changed over the first two centuries of the Principate, and the virtues that were revered and the ways they could be celebrated had also changed. I would also challenge the notion of a clear divide in the values esteemed by the aristocracy and those expressed lower down the social scale. Studies of freedmen art, in particular, would seem

⁹⁶ See especially Mayer 2012: 149: 'Other scenes of loss and suffering would have thrown a bad light on the mourners themselves, if they had understood the sarcophagi in question as conversation pieces to show off their literary knowledge.'

⁹⁷ For the critiques below see especially Mouritsen 2012 and Wallace-Hadrill 2013, also Petersen 2013 and Squire 2013c.

⁹⁸ See Borg 2013: 206–9 for a review of evidence relating to third-century sarcophagi.

⁹⁹ Seen by Mayer 2012: 141 as an exception. The sarcophagus is discussed further below, [Chapter 6](#), pp. 307–8.

¹⁰⁰ Mayer 2012: 150.

to suggest the opposite, the proud assertion of belonging to a common set of social values shared by free and freed, 'elite' and 'non-elite' alike.¹⁰¹

Of course there remained old patrician families who wanted to glorify their ancestors and commemorate their political careers (though the numbers of the old patrician classes in the senate were diminishing, and the so-called senatorial sarcophagi are identified as such based on their iconography rather than clear inscriptional evidence), yet there were many more in the upper echelons of society than rich patricians.¹⁰² While Mayer is right to draw our attention to the wider section of the art-purchasing society, there remain questions about how to characterise this. Where do we place the rich freedmen who feature among Statius and Martial's patrons, and are certainly commemorated by a number of sarcophagi, or the new provincial senators? While moralists could lament it, Roman society was characterised by the possibility for great upward mobility.¹⁰³ Men who became wealthy through trade were just as likely to pay for tutors for their sons, and advertise their education through art-works and literary commissions, as indeed we see satirised in a work such as Petronius' *Satyricon*. Of course there was a spectrum of ability, but to see a clear divide between the educated elite and a non-educated middle class seems perverse and unlikely. This is not to say that all used myth in exactly the same way, but that the same range of options was open at least to all those rich enough to commission these works and it was personal choice that determined which iconography was chosen and why.

Modes of Engagement

Mayer's argument posits a strict division between the intellectualised viewings of the elite and what he sees as the more prosaic use of myth by the middle classes. Talking of the use of Niobe as the *exemplum* of a grieving mother on Roman sarcophagi, he comments:

But such an interpretation was not in line with the intertextual viewing practices of witty intellectuals like Lucian or pedantic schoolmasters like Philostratus. Instead, it resonated with poems of well-read nonelites, who would probably not have been considered learned (*docti*) by the flashy upper-class intellectuals in Rome.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ See especially L. H. Petersen 2006.

¹⁰² On the issue of senatorial sarcophagi see Wrede 2001 and review by Ewald 2003.

¹⁰³ Dench 2005: 113–15, 143–51. ¹⁰⁴ Mayer 2012: 146.

Yet Mayer does not consider the contexts of these different readings. Lucian's and Philostratus' interpretations are firmly aligned with their rhetorical agenda to present themselves as masters and instructors in the use of Greek culture. The sorts of narratives that were appropriate in a funerary context were different. Here the object of praise was the deceased, and myths were used to assert communal or familial ideals and values. Rather than seeing a strict division between the uses of myth by the elite and the 'middle class', I want to show instead how there existed a range of interpretative possibilities for myth, which were used differently in different contexts and periods.¹⁰⁵ These overlap, and were accessible at varying levels to all those viewing mythological images, though some contexts made a particular type of response more likely than another.

In this introduction I have referred particularly to the exemplary use of myth, as a discourse within which social values and identities could be discussed. My aim has been to show that older interpretations that saw myth as 'pure' decoration and intellectual showing-off undervalued its role in Roman culture. Yet this is not to deny that mythological images offered important opportunities for patrons and viewers to demonstrate their education and absorb themselves in an educated fantasy world of Greek culture. Instead, the success of mythological images seems to have lain in the fact that they could accommodate so many different readings, offering both learned entertainment and the possibility of profound statements about human life. Over time the exemplary use of myth came to dominate, particularly in the funerary realm, but without ousting the other possibilities that myth offered, and that made it so attractive as a mode of discourse. The chapters below explore the different modes of engagement invited by mythological images, and the process by which the exemplary roles played by myth came to the fore.

As already noted, the visual language of most mythological imagery in Roman art is predominantly drawn from Greek art, especially that of the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Past attempts to identify particular Greek masterpieces behind the majority of Roman idealising sculpture or paintings now seem misplaced; nevertheless, many mythological paintings and sculptures did enter Rome as part of the booty from conquests in Greek lands, and their display in public contexts established a taste for such images and set patterns for their display that could also be carried

¹⁰⁵ Zanker 1999a identifies three ways of viewing myths, which overlap in parts with my own: the individual's use of myth as a model and consolation; myth's role in the creation of *otium*; and the manipulation of myth to have relevance to the inhabitants of the house.

through into the domestic realm. [Chapter 1](#) discusses this history, and the public display of mythological images in Rome. As part of the spoils of military conquest these images acted as statements of Rome's power, presenting the rewards of empire to the broader Roman public and becoming part of the communal patrimony. They could offer the opportunity for displays of artistic connoisseurship and assert the chosen self-image of their dedicators. The later chapters show that elsewhere mythological images also came to play important roles in the formation and expression of central Roman values. Analysis of the myths displayed in the public sphere suggests that this was less true here: while myths could be used to present proof of the power of the gods in whose sanctuaries they were dedicated, or for the analogies they presented with political events, traditional Roman values were primarily asserted through examples from Roman history or myth, with Greek myths being only rarely used in this way.

[Chapter 2](#) turns to the recreation of mythological landscapes in Roman houses and villas. In particular, it explores the mythological sculptural groups that were set up in elite villas. These suggest that part of the attraction of myth was the entrance it afforded to a world of the imagination. Generalised images of gods and their retinues (Apollo, the Muses, Dionysiac figures) helped to create particular atmospheres in the villa, suiting the self-image of their owners and affording elevated entertainment to their guests. The insertion into these spaces of sculptural groups illustrating particular mythological events helped to reify this atmosphere of divine presence, and also offered sophisticated pleasures of voyeurism. At the same time as they drew their viewers into a mythological world of the imagination, such images also allowed for complex displays of erudition, allowing guests to debate the mythological traditions around the particular events displayed.

The tension between absorption and erudition, between the desire to immerse oneself in the world of the image and stand back detached from it, is a key feature of Philostratus' *Imagines*, a Greek text from the early third century AD that purports to teach how properly to understand and approach paintings.¹⁰⁶ Philostratus was a key exponent and chronicler of the so-called Second Sophistic, the revival of Attic oratory and glorification of the Greek past that flourished across the Mediterranean from the late

¹⁰⁶ See Newby 2009 and [Chapter 3](#), below. Around two-thirds of the paintings he discusses are on mythological themes.

first to early third centuries AD.¹⁰⁷ Yet Philostratus does not just tell us how a Greek might respond to the visual arts; his display of educated viewing is precisely located within a villa on the Bay of Naples – a heavily Hellenised area of Italy, certainly, but also one long frequented by Romans and a place where they could adopt Greek culture and begin to consider how to incorporate it into the business of being Romans.¹⁰⁸

Philostratus' address is presented partly as a reply to the importunate youths who have been pestering this famous sophist during his trip to Campania, but it is also specifically addressed to his host's young son, to teach him how to view paintings.¹⁰⁹ Philostratus was a famous itinerant sophist, but Greek tutors of lesser fame were also embedded in Roman families, as Lucian shows.¹¹⁰ Elsewhere, Lucian also reveals the importance of proper viewings of art in his introduction *On the Hall*, where he distinguishes between the approach to images typical of the educated man (*pepaideumenos*) and that of the mute layman (*idiotēs*).¹¹¹ These teachers of the ways to view images present themselves both as masters of art, able to explain the content and artistic skills of the imagery, and as implicated in these visual enticements. They show that absorption and erudition, fantasy and *paideia*, are all valid responses to the enticements of visual arts. Chapter 3 examines the insights which these texts can give us into the viewing strategies that could be adopted in the first to third centuries AD. In addition to discussing the Greek works by Lucian and Philostratus, I also look at a Latin text, Petronius' *Satyricon*, a work which, like the *Imagines*, is set in the Hellenised, cultured world of Campania, and offers a range of different models for one's interaction with visual imagery.

Conversance with the past world of Greece is a prominent feature of the Second Sophistic, evident in the works and reported speeches of great Greek orators such as Aelius Aristides, Herodes Atticus and Polemon.¹¹² Yet there is plentiful evidence that knowledge of the obscure details of Greek myth or history was a defining feature of the Roman elite too, manifested in the erudite questions posed by Tiberius, as reported by Suetonius, or, at a parodic level, in Trimalchio's confident yet erroneous

¹⁰⁷ On the Second Sophistic see Bowersock 1969, 1974; G. Anderson 1993. On Philostratus see G. Anderson 1986; Billault 2000; Bowie and Elsner 2009.

¹⁰⁸ E.g. Suetonius, *Augustus* 98; see Wallace-Hadrill 1998b; 2008a: 3–70. Whether or not Philostratus actually gave such an address is irrelevant; what matters here is that he chooses to present it as happening in Campania.

¹⁰⁹ *Imagines* preface 4–5. ¹¹⁰ *On Salaried Posts in Great Houses*.

¹¹¹ *On the Hall* 1–3. ¹¹² Swain 1996; Whitmarsh 2001.

descriptions of the scenes on his silverware.¹¹³ The allusive references in Latin poetry similarly presuppose an educated audience, who will recognise and understand these references, and mythological tales seem to have been a staple of Latin poetry.¹¹⁴ At the same time, even further down the social scale, a basic knowledge of the main myths was guaranteed by the educational system and simply by the overwhelming visual presence of these stories, which were also performed on the stage and in the arena.¹¹⁵ While Philostratus' *Imagines* offers a sophisticated insight into the complexities of appreciating visual imagery, comparisons with other texts suggest a widespread view that to present oneself as a member of the educated classes, it was essential to make a correct response to visual imagery.¹¹⁶ These texts suggest that mythological images could always provoke displays of *paideia*, alongside a range of other reactions or interpretations.

Philostratus and Lucian also reveal the rhetorical possibilities that images could offer, acting not just as a means to show off the education of the viewer, but also as the primary material for particular rhetorical arguments. Indeed, an important way of viewing mythological images is to see them as *exempla* or paradigms. The Greek word *paradeigma*, translated into Latin as *exemplum*, has two different but related functions in Latin literature and rhetoric, and both are important for our understanding of the use of mythological images as *exempla*. The first explains an *exemplum* as a form of proof to be used in a rhetorical argument, a comparison by which the force of the claim can be made more strongly. The second takes *exempla* as didactic models, designed to encourage the behaviour they manifest in their audiences or viewers. Quintilian's discussion of *exempla* includes illustrations of both.¹¹⁷ Giving an instance of the use of a mythological example to prove an argument, Quintilian quotes from Cicero:

Even in their fictions learned men have recorded that a man who had killed his mother to avenge his father, when the verdicts of the human judges were divided, was freed by a divine verdict – the verdict indeed of the wisest of goddesses.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 70; Petronius, *Satyrica* 52.

¹¹⁴ E.g. Vergil, *Georgics* 3.4–8; Juvenal, *Satire* 1.1–14.

¹¹⁵ Lucian, *On the Dance*; Coleman 1990; Leach 2004: 130–2, 151 argues for the influence of stage performances on domestic decoration. See also Horsfall 2003a: 48–74 and Cameron 2004 on mythography.

¹¹⁶ For discussion of different Roman viewing strategies see Elsner 1995, 2007.

¹¹⁷ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 5.11.

¹¹⁸ Cicero, *Pro Milone* 3.8, quoted in Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 5.11.18, trans. D. A. Russell, Loeb Classical Library 125 (Cambridge, MA), 139–41.

Here, the mythical precedent of Orestes is used to support Cicero's claim that Milo should not be punished for the murder of Clodius. A didactic use of an *exemplum* appears a little earlier. When discussing arguments from unlike proofs, Quintilian states that in a hortatory argument, 'if we are urging a man to meet death, the cases of Cato and Scipio will carry less weight than that of Lucretia'.¹¹⁹ The evidence of a woman carrying out an extreme deed is used to urge on a man.

While other rhetorical texts differ slightly in their discussion of these terms, Quintilian's discussion of *exempla* offers a helpful model for considering the possible receptions of mythological images. Chapter 4 looks at the ways that mythological images displayed in houses could have acted as a storehouse of *exempla* that could be deployed in a range of different rhetorical arguments, presenting, for example, serial examples of the power of love, or contrasting forms of life-style. The mythological images on sarcophagi can also be read as the proofs of a eulogistic narrative about the deceased, as suggested in Chapter 6. While the sarcophagus provided the proof, the viewer is invited to supply the argument, for example by recalling the manly virtue of a man whose heroism made him the equal to the hunter Meleager. Where myths seem to symbolise particular Roman virtues we can see them not just as recalling and eulogising the deceased, but also as having a didactic function, to pass down this model of behaviour to those who see it.¹²⁰ In private houses too, the mythological images that decorated private houses could serve to debate the value of particular sorts of behaviour, as we can see from the examples discussed in Chapter 4. Bettina Bergmann suggests that for viewers steeped in a rhetorical culture, the house and its decoration offered material which could be used to construct a rhetorical speech.¹²¹ Yet the very flexibility of myths and the personal tastes of individual viewers allowed them to serve this purpose for very different arguments. While the images may have been set up to assert a specific set of views or associations by the patron, other viewers could also impose their own wider rhetorical narratives upon them, relating them to their own concerns. In this role myth offered a space to think about what it was to be human, and how to live as a Roman in the changing world of the first three centuries AD.¹²² While

¹¹⁹ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 5.11.10.

¹²⁰ This twofold nature of *exempla* as both commemorating good deeds and encouraging them is explored by Roller 2004.

¹²¹ Bergmann 1994.

¹²² See especially Muth 1998, 1999 and Trimble 2002 on mythological images in domestic contexts as helping to debate and construct gender roles.

literary texts continue to assert the value of Roman historical models as a framework within which to explore the expression of Roman virtues, the evidence from houses and tombs suggests that, for many, Greek mythological narratives came instead to fulfil this need.

One of the advantages of myth over history may have been its ability to present universalising analogies for human experience. As others have noted, myth could offer comparisons to human experience that acted both to elevate and to console, especially in the funerary sphere.¹²³ The emotional power of mythological paradigms for human experience is noted by Paul Zanker, who recalls Plutarch's representation of Brutus' wife Portia, crying as she gazed at an image of the parting of Andromache and Hector because of its relevance to her own situation.¹²⁴ Myths offered solace through showing that even the greatest heroes of the past were subject to love, death and loss. Indeed, Marcus Aurelius comments in his *Meditations* that he has found consolation through reading in tragedies of the terrible things that have happened before and been endured.¹²⁵ The use of myths on sarcophagi, explored in [Chapter 6](#), suggests the adoption of a poetic mode of expression, in which human truths are conveyed in the universalising language of myth.¹²⁶ Yet as studies of mythological allusions in poetry have shown, while myth can be used to elevate and illustrate, it can also usher in other associations that work against the explicit thrust of the comparison.¹²⁷ The same was true of images, and while a particular commissioner may have intended a particular point through the use of a mythological allusion, the very multivalency of myth meant that it was often difficult to constrain its meaning to one particular aspect. Indeed, this may be one reason for the increased use of portrait heads on third-century sarcophagi, which allowed the resonances of the myth to be narrowed down and tied more clearly to the individual commemorated within.¹²⁸

With all of these modes of engagement, context is key. The positioning of mythological imagery in different sorts of spaces opened up possibilities for different types of responses. A country villa setting may have steered the viewer more strongly to enter the fantasy world of the imagery than would have the display of heroic deeds in the atrium of a townhouse or

¹²³ See Koortbojian 1995: 1–9 specifically on analogy, and Zanker and Ewald 2004, 2012.

¹²⁴ Plutarch, *Brutus* 23; Zanker 1999a: 40–1. ¹²⁵ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 11.6.

¹²⁶ See further Newby 2014. For some discussions of the use of myth in Latin love elegy to elevate and universalise see Whitaker 1983; Griffin 1985, and, more generally, 1986. On the fictionalisation of reality in Roman culture see Coleman 2005, also 1999.

¹²⁷ E.g. Macleod 1974; Feeney 1992. ¹²⁸ Newby 2011.

on a funerary monument. In all these settings, however, *paideia* plays an important role. Mythological imagery required its viewers to know and recognise their narratives. This knowledge may have varied from the basic to the complex: a general knowledge of mythological figures and storylines was widespread, passed on by performances of myths on the stage and in the oral tradition, while those with higher levels of education would have a more detailed knowledge of intricate retellings of myths such as those given by the Attic tragedians. Ownership of mythological imagery allowed figures at different levels of society to assert their cultural credentials while the display of such images could also help to provoke and structure intellectual debate. For all those with at least a basic education, it provided a common cultural language, which could, however, also be used for the expression of claims of superior cultural knowledge. In literary genres myth is primarily the preserve of poetry rather than prose. Its expression in art could therefore also add the atmosphere of epic, elegy or tragedy to the spaces it decorated, elevating them above the world of the everyday.¹²⁹

Connoisseurship, *paideia*, elevation, escapism, *exemplum*, paradigm and analogy: these are some of the roles enabled or played by mythological imagery. In the subsequent chapters I explore these different modes of engagement within a range of different contexts. While some reactions, such as the use of myth to reveal *paideia*, seem to have been possible within all settings and time periods, it does also seem possible to discern a chronological development in the use of mythological imagery. The earliest contexts show especially the desire to offer an entrance into a world of fantasy and the imagination, as well as to prompt displays of education and erudition, whereas from the mid-first century AD onwards we find a much greater use of myth as a metaphor for human life, and as a way to debate or praise different sorts of values and life-styles.

In public art the exemplary use of myth is primarily tied to expressions of power, with mythological scenes serving to support the power of the gods. While Octavian/Augustus also seems to have used myth as a covert analogy for political events, later he and other emperors preferred to narrow down the meanings of public art to assert the traditional Roman values of *pietas* and military valour, and found Roman myth and history a better means of doing so. In more private contexts, however, mythological narratives offered the possibility to debate and assert Roman values through reference to a common storehouse of stories known and accessible to all. The Epilogue looks at the reasons why myth came to play such

¹²⁹ E.g. A. Stewart 2006 on tragic resonances.

a central role in the construction of Roman identities, and the advantages it offered over stories from Rome's historical and legendary past, the traditional models for Roman virtues. The representations of Greek myth in art offer us an insight into the changes in Roman society from the late Republic to the mid-third century, adding to our understanding of the ways Rome used the cultures she absorbed to reframe her own changing identities and values.

Marcellus, having captured Syracuse . . . carried away to Rome the adornments of the city, the statues, and paintings which Syracuse possessed in abundance. Indeed, these were spoils from the enemy, and acquired by right of war; yet from that action came the very start of the admiration for Greek works of art.

Livy 25.40.1–2

Then the army of the Roman people first became accustomed to licentiousness and intemperance, and began to admire statues, paintings and sculptured vases.

Sallust, *Catiline Conspiracy* 11

The conquest of Asia first sent luxury into Italy.

Pliny, *Natural History* 33.148–9

For Roman writers of the first centuries BC and AD, it was Rome's military conquest of Sicily, Greece and Asia Minor that had led to her passion for Greek works of art. While these three writers place the origins of this at different moments (the sack of Syracuse, Sulla's campaigns against Mithridates, and the conquest of Asia in the first half of the second century BC), they all agree that this influx of Greek art into Rome led to a passion for Greek art-works, which in turn had a deleterious effect on public morals and behaviour.

The rhetoric of these attacks, with their associations between collecting, luxury and sacrilege, has been well discussed by others.¹ What interests me here is the close connection these accounts make between Greek art and Roman power. Art and conquest are inextricably linked. While Greek imagery and art-works had certainly entered and influenced Rome before the sack of Syracuse, for later Romans Greek art-works carried with them strong associations with Rome's military conquest of the East.² The fate

¹ For a good general account see Gruen 1993: 84–130. On the rhetoric of luxury see Isager 1991: 70–3 and Carey 2003: 75–101 on Pliny; Edwards 1993: 137–72 on luxury in architecture; and, for a more theoretical account, Wallace-Hadrill 2008a: 315–55.

² On the earlier period see Hölscher 1978; 1990: 74–9; also Wiseman 2008: 84–139.

of these objects once they entered Italy reaffirmed this link. The spoils of victory were carried in public display through the city of Rome during military triumphs, before being more widely distributed.³ While some went into private collections to decorate elite villas, others were displayed in existing public spaces, or used to fund or adorn new victory monuments celebrating the donor's military successes and marking Rome's hegemony to her people.⁴ That these captured art-works did indeed lead to a wider fashion for Greek-style art-works is attested by the discovery of old and new works in the cargoes of the *Mahdia* and *Antikythera* shipwrecks, many of which were destined for displays in Roman villas.⁵ As we will see below, in [Chapter 2](#), such images could carry with them the associations of Roman power, presenting the delights of empire for the enjoyment of the host and his guests. Here, however, we will look at the ways such objects were displayed in the public sphere, and the roles that mythological images could play in these public contexts.

Of course, the art-works brought in through Roman conquest did not only consist of mythological images. Paintings and sculptures representing historical, allegorical, divine and mythological figures sat alongside cabinets of gems, prestigious metalware and other curiosities.⁶ Depending on the circumstances of their display, these images could have had a range of meanings, and their content may at times have been secondary to their style and status as works by great Greek masters, or their derivation from conquest.

Indeed, recent studies have suggested that a number of interconnected factors are important in understanding Roman collecting and display, including the desire to make general assertions of power connected to the ideas of booty and conquest; values of artistic connoisseurship; and ideological and genealogical claims.⁷ Deciding between these factors for individual art-works is not always easy. In contrast to the images discussed in the rest of this book, many of the works which we know were publicly displayed in the city of Rome are now lost to us, many of them victims of the frequent fires that afflicted Rome in antiquity. We are often dependent

³ On the triumph see Östenberg 2009.

⁴ On Republican victory monuments see especially Pietilä-Castrén 1987. For broader accounts of Roman collecting and display see Edwards 2003; Bounia 2004; Miles 2008; Bravi 2012; and Rutledge 2012, building on important earlier studies by Jucker 1950; D. E. Strong 1973; Pape 1975; and Pollitt 1978.

⁵ Hellenkemper-Salies, von Prittwitz und Gaffron and Bauchhenß 1994; Wallace-Hadrill 2008a: 361–71; Kaltsas, Vlachogianni and Bouyia 2012.

⁶ Rutledge 2012. ⁷ See especially Bounia 2004; Miles 2008; and Rutledge 2012.

entirely on brief literary accounts, such as those contained in Pliny's *Natural History*, which may only give a brief mention of the subject and artist of a painting or sculpture, leaving us unclear as to the precise scene represented. In other cases, as for other images discussed in this book, we have archaeological remains, but lack a detailed knowledge of the original provenance or context.

Nevertheless, it is important to sketch out the contexts in which mythological images were displayed in Rome, since it is clear that in many cases public display influenced private receptions, and similar modes of viewing could be carried across from one context to the other. In the first half of the chapter I will look at a number of issues that are important for our understanding of Greek art in general, as well as mythological images in particular: the use of art to reaffirm Roman power, the question of connoisseurship and the 'right' way to treat Greek art, and the representational and ideological uses to which mythological figures and stories could be put. This will then lead to the exploration in the second half of the chapter of the question of exemplarity in Roman public art. As I argue in later chapters, the exemplary possibilities of myth played a major role in later art, particularly on domestic wall-paintings and Roman sarcophagi. Yet there is an interesting contrast here with the role of myth in public art, which suggests a growing divergence between state and individual assertions of Roman values as the Principate progressed.

Ornamentum urbis: Art and Power

odit populus Romanus privatam luxuriam, publicam magnificentiam
diligat

The Roman populace hates private luxury, but loves public magnificence.

Cicero, *pro Murena* 76

From the late third century BC onwards Greek art-works were used both to ornament the city and to enhance the self-image of the victorious generals who had secured them. While the objects dedicated in temples were ostensibly offerings to the gods, in thanks for military victories, they also presented the Roman people with public collections, also to be found in porticoes and other public spaces.⁸ The public display of plunder was an important ideological statement, making the proceeds of Roman military

⁸ See Cicero, *In Verrem* 2.4.126 on public collections as places to view art.

victory accessible to all as part of the communal heritage of the Roman people.⁹ This is a major theme in literary discussions, apparently going back as far as the Elder Cato, to whom is attributed a speech *uti praeda in publicum referatur*, ‘that booty be returned to public use’.¹⁰ Later rulers are also shown as understanding the political value of making art-works accessible to public view. Julius Caesar is said to have made his statues and paintings public property in his will, while Pliny praises Agrippa for a speech urging that all paintings and statues should be made public, as well as noting Vespasian’s actions in transferring the splendours of the *Domus Aurea* to the public Temple of Peace.¹¹ In contrast, the actions of emperors such as Tiberius, Gaius or Nero to keep plundered statues for their own enjoyment are seen as negative *exempla*, and the public reaction to Tiberius’ removal of Lysippus’ *Apoxyomenus* statue into his private possession suggests that the Roman people regarded such statues as part of their communal property, the removal of which could be fiercely opposed.¹²

Taken as a collective, the display of art-works and other artefacts that entered Rome as plunder from military victories can be read as assertions of the power of Rome and her victorious generals, and the city as a whole viewed as a microcosm of the world, encompassing as it did the resources of so many captured peoples.¹³ This is particularly clear for the Temple of Peace, funded by the emperor Vespasian from the proceeds of his Jewish war.¹⁴ In addition to containing many of the spoils from Jerusalem it also hosted a plethora of art-works which had previously been displayed elsewhere in the city. Josephus describes it as embodying the collections of the whole world: ‘into that temple were collected and contained everything which men previously travelled all over the world to see, eager to look at them individually when they were in different lands’.¹⁵ Pliny tells us that it also housed a number of famous art-works previously

⁹ See discussions by Pape 1975: 73–80; Pollitt 1978: 164–9; Miles 2008: 218–84.

¹⁰ Malcovati 1955: 42, M. Porcius Cato no. 22. See D. E. Strong 1973: 248–9; Pape 1975: 74. See also Livy, *Periochae* 52 on Mummius, and Cicero, *In Verrem* 2.4.120, contrasting Verres with the example of Marcellus, who used his spoils to build the Temple of Honos and Virtus: Palombi 1996; Pape 1975: 6–7.

¹¹ Cicero, *Philippics* 2.109; Pliny, *Natural History* 35.26; 34.84.

¹² Pliny, *Natural History* 34.62; Miles 2008: 252–9.

¹³ See Carey 2003; Bounia 2004: 173–220; and Rutledge 2012: 123–57. Specifically on art-works see Rouveret 1987; Isager 1991; Bounia 2004: 200–7; Carey 2003: 75–101.

¹⁴ Pape 1975: 181–3; Bravi 2012: 167–81; Rutledge 2012: 272–84. Noreña 2003 reads the complex as an expression of the benefits of peace through conquest.

¹⁵ Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.162.

on display in Nero's *Domus Aurea*.¹⁶ While Pliny is rather imprecise about which works in particular were displayed here, the overall effect is one of totality.¹⁷ Rome is set up as containing the most famous art-works of the whole world, a statement which is corroborated, at least in part, by the discovery in the area of the Temple of Peace of statue bases bearing the names of Praxiteles, Cephisodotus and Polycleitus.¹⁸

Rome can be read as a museum city, incorporating her own legendary past as well as the resources of her empire.¹⁹ Many older buildings and collections set up by notable figures from the past still existed in later Rome, often restored and incorporated into newer buildings. The reuse and restoration of earlier monuments often makes it hard for modern scholars to distinguish what was present at one particular period, but for ancient viewers the effect must have been of a palimpsest of the past, which evoked famous victories from history and turned them to the needs of present ideologies. As Rutledge has shown, these collections did not just serve the self-representation of those who originally devised them, they also acted at a more collective level, to present the Roman people with the defining characteristics of their own past and identity.²⁰

Both 'native' and 'foreign' artefacts could play a crucial role in this ongoing creation of Roman identity. Remnants of the distant past, such as Romulus' hut and Cincinnatus' fields, as well as honorific monuments attesting to the notable deeds of Roman men and women (such as the statues of Cloelia or Horatius Cocles) offered enduring images of Rome's own past and distinctive virtues.²¹ Such monuments could play a didactic role, reminding their viewers of the values and associations which were

¹⁶ Pliny, *Natural History* 34.84.

¹⁷ Rutledge 2012: 275 cites Pliny as including the battles of Attalus and Eumenes against the Gauls and Boethius' child strangling a goose among those works taken by Vespasian from the *Domus Aurea*, yet the text of Pliny does not make this explicit. It is unclear how much of the preceding discussion of famous art-works should be included in 'all the works I have mentioned', and at least some of these are explicitly said to have been displayed elsewhere. See Pollitt 1978: 158, 170–4 for a more cautious approach.

¹⁸ La Rocca 2001: 196–201.

¹⁹ Esp. Rutledge 2012. On the role of collections as structuring time and space see also Bounia 2004: 137–70. On Rome as the culmination of years of history see Pliny, *Natural History* 36.101–5 with discussions by Edwards 1996: 99–109 and Carey 2003: 94–9.

²⁰ Much of Rutledge 2012 stresses the communal role played by collections, though he also illustrates the concerns of individual collections, especially the emperors (221–86).

²¹ On Romulus' hut see Edwards 1996: 30–43; Rea 2007: 21–43; on Cincinnatus' fields, the Prata Quintia on the Vatican hill, see Livy 3.26.8–9; Pliny, *Natural History* 18.20; Rutledge 2012: 187. On the experience of Rome's past see Rea 2007 and Dardenay 2010; for monuments of famous Romans see Roller 2004. For insights into how ancients experienced the city see Edwards 1996 and Favro 1996.

thought to be intrinsically ‘Roman’. But foreign models, too, could be appropriated to play this role. Pliny the Elder records the instruction of the Pythian Apollo at the time of the Samnite Wars to set up statues to the bravest (*fortissimo*) and wisest (*sapientissimo*) of the Greeks.²² Although he criticises the choice of Pythagoras and Alcibiades as fulfilment of these criteria, the statues set up to these men in the Comitia suggest that these Greek figures were serving as exemplary figures, designed to spur on Romans to emulation of the virtues they embodied.

Over time, foreign art-works became absorbed into the cityscape of Rome, sometimes to the extent that they could become defining objects of Roman identity. This is the case with the Nike of Tarentum, redisplayed by Augustus in the Curia in Rome as part of an Altar of Victory. Following the removal of the Altar in the fourth century AD, we find a letter of Symmachus asking for its restitution as an essential part of Roman heritage. As Catharine Edwards notes, while this statue was originally a Greek spoil taken from the city of Tarentum, by the fourth century it appears as a key part of the patrimony of Rome, with which the city’s very identity and safety are shown as being integrally connected.²³ As we saw in the Introduction, the accretive nature of Roman identity meant that art-works, like other aspects of Greek culture, could be assimilated into the construction of a broader Roman identity.²⁴

Collections of captured art-works asserted the dominance of Rome as a conquering power, while individual objects could play important roles in the changing formulations of Roman identity. What, however, of the aesthetic appeal of these objects, and the perilous enticement to luxury and licentiousness which seems to worry writers such as Livy, Sallust and Pliny? The literary texts often suggest an ambiguous attitude towards the appreciation of art for its aesthetic qualities, seeing it as potentially corrosive of traditional Roman moral values. In the *Verrines*, Cicero is eager to attack Verres’ obsessive passion for collecting Greek art, though much of his attack rests on the fact that Verres uses his collection for private enjoyment and the violence with which he acquired it.²⁵ Plutarch suggests that the Romans blamed Marcellus (the figure Livy attributes with first introducing Greek art to Rome) for making them idle chatterers of the merits of Greek art, whereas Marcellus saw it as a mark of pride that he had

²² Pliny, *Natural History* 34.26; Hölscher 1978: 340.

²³ Symmachus, *Relatio* 3; see Edwards 2003: 59–60.

²⁴ See especially Dench 2005, and Introduction above.

²⁵ For analysis of Cicero’s attitudes see Bounia 2004: 269–306 and Miles 2008: 152–217.

introduced them to the ‘wonderful and beautiful production of Greece’.²⁶ The private enjoyment of art can even be seen as morally degenerate, with intimations of perversion, as we see in references to Tiberius and Gaius’ lust for particular images and their attempts to enjoy them in seclusion.²⁷

On the other hand, a certain degree of artistic knowledge seems to have become a required feature of an educated man. Thus L. Mummius can be mocked for the suggestion that he did not understand the artistic merits of the booty he took from Corinth, and only valued some pieces, such as Aristides’ painting of Dionysus, once he saw the amounts of money others were prepared to pay for them.²⁸ Scholars have interpreted these inconsistencies in a number of ways, Pollitt suggesting that there were competing camps in attitudes to Greek art, as to the rest of Greek culture, into the Catonians and the connoisseurs.²⁹ Yet such divisions may be too stark. In his discussion of attitudes to Hellenism Gruen suggested that Cato should not be seen as anti-Hellenic *per se*, but rather as concerned that Greek culture should be tailored to the needs of Roman power.³⁰ As Wallace-Hadrill too has shown, using Greek culture properly can be a distinguishing mark of the educated Roman.³¹ This does not mean that the ‘right’ way to use Greek culture was always clear. Rather, it seems as though one could always be open to the accusation of excessive or inappropriate Hellenism in relationship to art as much as in any other sphere.

By the later first century AD, despite the moralising comments of some, a certain degree of artistic knowledge seems to have become an essential attribute of the educated man.³² Both Statius and Martial wrote poems celebrating Novius Vindex’s ownership of a statuette of Hercules Epitrapezius by Lysippus, noting the famous pedigree of the statue, which was said to have been owned by Alexander the Great, Hannibal and Sulla before Novius himself.³³ Statius portrays Vindex as a collector of innumerable old statues, able to attribute works to the likes of Myron, Praxiteles

²⁶ Plutarch, *Marcellus* 21.5. For discussions of attitudes towards Marcellus see Gros 1979; Ferrary 1988: 573–8; and Gruen 1993: 94–101.

²⁷ Pliny, *Natural History* 34.62–4; 35.17–18; see Bounia 2004: 197–8.

²⁸ Velleius Paterculus 1.13.4; Pliny, *Natural History* 35.34; Dio Chrysostom [Favorinus], *Or.* 37.42; see discussion in Gruen 1993: 123–9.

²⁹ Pollitt 1978. ³⁰ Gruen 1993: 52–83; see also 110–13 on Cato’s attitudes to art.

³¹ Wallace-Hadrill 1998b.

³² For a discussion of the appreciation of art across society see Rutledge 2012: 79–121.

³³ Martial, *Epigrams* 9.43–4; Statius, *Silvae* 4.6. For discussions see Coleman 1988: 173–6; Newlands 2002b: 73–87; Bounia 2004: 226–7. Newlands 2002b: 76, 81 notes that Statius relocates the proper display of art from the public to the private sphere; see also Miles 2008: 265–70.

and Polycleitus.³⁴ Though there may well be an element of hyperbole in these poems, they suggest that a connoisseurial knowledge of art could form part of an individual's self-representation as a member of a wealthy, cultured elite. Here, too, it was important to get it right. Martial mocks those who make excessive claims beyond their station, as in his epigram on the poor man Mamurra, who haunts the art-dealers' shops in the Saepta, pretending knowledge he is unable to afford.³⁵

A number of public spaces in Rome can be viewed primarily as art galleries, encompassing collections of the finest Greek artists and making these accessible for the general public to enjoy. Cicero names the Temple of Fortune, the Portico of Metellus and the monument of Catulus as places where Romans can see art-works the like of those collected by Verres.³⁶ Such spaces included mythological images, among other themes, which could be appreciated individually, as masterpieces of ancient art, but also as part of a wider collection, which may have had particular unifying themes and meanings.

That a range of meanings could cluster around a single image can be seen back in the second century BC, in the case of a painting by the fourth-century artist Aristides, which was dedicated by L. Mummius in the Temple of Ceres at Rome. Strabo described it as a most beautiful painting, though he notes that it had recently been destroyed by fire.³⁷ Pliny the Elder also refers to the painting twice. In the first passage the painting is mentioned as part of Pliny's narrative about the origins of the taste for foreign paintings in Rome. Here it is described as 'a painting of Aristides, Liber Pater'.³⁸ Later, however, in a longer account of Aristides' works he mentions 'Liber and Ariadne, which used to be visible at Rome in the temple of Ceres'.³⁹ While it is possible that Pliny refers here to two separate paintings, other references to the painting of Dionysus/Liber do not refer to a companion piece and it seems plausible that we are dealing here with just one painting, showing Dionysus and Ariadne together.⁴⁰

This painting embodies many of the issues surrounding the display of mythological images (and other art-works) at Rome. Was it dedicated on the grounds of its aesthetic merit as a masterpiece by a fourth-century artist, because of its monetary value or for its subject matter? In the literary sources it serves as a pivotal piece around which to discuss ideas about the

³⁴ Statius, *Silvae* 4.6.20–31.

³⁵ Martial, *Epigrams* 9.59. See Bounia 2004: 221–43 for a broader discussion of Martial.

³⁶ Cicero, *In Verrem* 2.4.126. ³⁷ Strabo 8.6.23. ³⁸ Pliny, *Natural History* 35.24.

³⁹ Pliny, *Natural History* 35.99. ⁴⁰ Pape 1975: 110 n. 121.

Roman appreciation of Greek art. Strabo cites Polybius, who talks of the Roman army's disregard for art-works in the Sack of Corinth, noting the fact that they were seen playing dice on paintings thrown on the ground, including this painting, as well as another by Aristides showing Heracles in torment.⁴¹ Pliny suggests that Mummius had also been in ignorance of the value of the painting, until he saw the monetary value Attalus of Pergamum was prepared to pay for it, at which point he recalled it to dedicate at Rome.⁴² While the details of Pliny's story have been rejected as anachronistic by scholars, the anecdote is an important expression of the idea that Mummius lacked the art-historical knowledge of Attalus, and only saw the value in the painting when he saw how much it was worth.⁴³ On this account Mummius dedicates the painting not because of his own appreciation of its aesthetic qualities, but because the value that others put on it makes it a worthy dedication to the gods in Rome. Mummius is said to have dedicated a number of other works in Rome and elsewhere in Italy; here art and booty acted as expression of Mummius' beneficence as a public patron in Rome and beyond, and art could be used in the service of his political self-promotion.⁴⁴

Yet the subject matter of the painting may also have played a role in Mummius' decision to dedicate it in the Temple of Ceres. This temple on the Aventine hill was dedicated jointly to Ceres, Liber and Libera.⁴⁵ The Roman god Liber Pater was equated with the Greek god Dionysus, as Pliny's description of the painting shows. The painting was thus an appropriate offering, honouring one of the three gods to whom the temple was dedicated. If the painting did include Ariadne too there may also have been wider resonances. If the painting showed the Discovery of Ariadne it would have stressed the mythological events in which Dionysus was involved, drawing the Roman god into the wider frame of Greek myth. However, if Dionysus and Ariadne were depicted instead as a couple, perhaps enthroned in a static scene, there may have been an implied association between Ariadne and Libera, pairing Liber and Libera as a couple in the way that Dionysus and Ariadne were shown here.⁴⁶ On this interpretation we might see the Greek painting as losing some of its narrative mythological quality to serve instead as a potent statement of the authority of two Roman gods. In the absence of any description of the

⁴¹ Polybius 39.2.1 (13); Strabo 8.6.23. ⁴² Pliny, *Natural History* 35.24.

⁴³ For discussion see Gruen 1993: 123–9. ⁴⁴ Strabo 8.6.23; see Rutledge 2012: 42–3.

⁴⁵ Coarelli 1993b.

⁴⁶ Ariadne is equated with Libera by Ovid, *Fasti* 3.512 and Hyginus, *Fabulae* 224, though elsewhere Libera is also linked with Persephone. See J. G. Frazer 1929: 109.

painting it is impossible to be sure, but it remains likely that the painting here had a range of meanings, serving as a symbol of conquest and appropriation, but also carrying the potential for ideological messages about the authority of the gods the temple honoured, and their relationship to the histories of the Greek gods to whom they could be assimilated.

When we turn to the first century BC, a number of spaces can be seen as art galleries, offering the public the chance to enjoy the spoils of empire, but also allowing the donor to show off his own artistic tastes and personal values. One example is the collection of late Hellenistic sculpture which formed the *monumenta* of Asinius Pollio.⁴⁷ The precise nature and location of these *monumenta* have been debated. Pliny seems to use the word to describe the art-works themselves, rather than the building in which they are placed. The collection included a number of works by late Hellenistic sculptors, many on mythological themes, such as the centaurs carrying nymphs by Arcesilaus, and most famously, the group of Dirce, Amphion, Zethus and the bull by the Rhodian sculptors Apollonius and Tauriscus, which is linked with the Farnese Bull statue group found in the later Baths of Caracalla (fig. 1.1).⁴⁸ While many believe that these art-works were displayed in the *Atrium Libertatis* which Asinius had rebuilt and extended, others suggest an original location in his gardens, the *Horti Asiniani*, in keeping with the Dionysiac tone of many of the works.⁴⁹ Pliny names a statue of Liber Pater by Eutychidis in the collection, and in mythological landscape wall-paintings the punishment of Dirce is often depicted in association with a shrine to Dionysus.⁵⁰ This Dionysiac tone was, however, paired with an emphasis on cultural figures such as the Muses and Appiades, suiting Asinius Pollio's literary interests.

Personal tastes certainly seem to lie behind Asinius Pollio's collection, and probably explain some other dedications in public spaces. Julius Caesar bought two paintings by the artist Timomachus of Byzantium for eighty talents and put them on display in front of the Temple of Venus

⁴⁷ Pliny, *Natural History* 36.33.

⁴⁸ Opinion is divided as to whether the Farnese Bull is the same statue as the one that formed part of Asinius Pollio's collection, or a Severan copy of it. See Heger 1990; Andreae 1993, 1996; Kunze 1998; La Rocca 1998: 246–70; Ridgway 1999.

⁴⁹ On the *Atrium Libertatis* see Pliny, *Natural History* 7.115; 35.10; Suetonius, *Augustus* 29; Ovid, *Tristia* 3.1.71–2. Isager 1991: 163–7 and Coarelli 1993a place the sculptures here, though the ancient sources only mention portraits of literary figures. For arguments placing the sculptures in the *Horti Asiniani*, see Pape 1975: 177–9; Grimal 1984: 157 n. 6; Neudecker 1988: 51–2; La Rocca 1998: 229–39.

⁵⁰ See Leach 1986 and L. B. Joyce 2001 for discussions.



Figure 1.1 Farnese Bull, Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 6002.

Genetrix in his Forum. They represented Medea and Ajax.⁵¹ The money spent on these suggests that Julius Caesar valued them as highly accomplished works of art, and the Medea, in particular, excited a number of ecphrastic epigrams.⁵² It is less clear whether Julius Caesar intended any deeper message from the scenes, though the myth of Medea could certainly be read as an illustration of the power of the goddess Venus. Rutledge suggests that this scene of the ‘beguiling witch’ Medea could have been read as an allusion to Caesar’s lover, Cleopatra, whose golden statue stood inside the temple.⁵³ Yet the painting showed Medea contemplating the

⁵¹ Pliny, *Natural History* 35.26, 136. ⁵² Gutzwiller 2004; Gurd 2007.

⁵³ Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.102; Rutledge 2012: 226–35, esp. 231–2.

deaths of her children, rather than as powerful helpmate to Jason. While she might later have been seen as offering an analogy to Cleopatra, following the latter's downfall, this seems less likely to have been Julius Caesar's intention. Later, the Temple of the Divine Augustus was decorated with a series of art-works, including Nicias' painting of Hyacinth, which Tiberius apparently added because it was one of Augustus' favourite pieces.⁵⁴ While Augustus had often used art-works for their ideological values, as we will see, it is less easy to read such a message here.

A primary feature of these collections seems to be the desire to make the works of famous artists accessible to all. They reinforced the idea of Rome as new home to the greatest achievements of the past, absorbing the products of empire and redisplaying them to the Roman populace and the wider world, while also setting up the donor of the space as a man of culture, taste and generosity. Similar collections of prestigious statuary are later found in the imperial baths, such as those of Caracalla and Constantine, where again they can be seen adding to the luxurious atmosphere of the space and constructing it as a place for certain types of activity, as well as manifesting the power and generosity of the emperor.⁵⁵

The Possibilities and Limitations of Greek Myth

So far, we have seen how the display of Greek art-works contributed to the creation of Rome as a capital city, and served to present the goods of empire to the Roman people, as well as to enhance the self-representation of specific individuals. These broader resonances were as valid for mythological images as for works on other themes, but I wish now to explore whether mythological images could be used in any specific ways for their symbolic or narrative potential. Through analysis of the use of mythological images first by the Republican general Pompey, and later by Octavian/Augustus, we will see how Greek myths could be used to support personal self-representation, as well as for their religious and political messages. As we saw in the Introduction, Augustus' reign is often seen as a watershed in the

⁵⁴ Pliny, *Natural History* 35.131.

⁵⁵ On sculptural display in baths see Manderscheid 1981. The Baths of Caracalla have received a number of detailed studies; see Marvin 1983; Gasparri 1983–4; DeLaine 1997: 265–7; von den Hoff 2004; and Newby 2005: 70–6. On the importance of the display of great art-works for the image of a capital city see Bassett 2004 and Miles 2008: 273–84 on Constantinople.

cultural as well as the political history of Rome.⁵⁶ In the use of mythological art, too, Augustus drew on the Republican traditions of public display but also sought to reshape them for his own political ends. Ultimately, however, Greek myth seems to have proved too unstable, too multivalent, to fit the political purposes of Augustus. As we shall see, while Greek myths could be displayed as signs of divine power, and as warnings against *hubris* that could also be read as offering analogies to political events, they never really came to play a positive role as *exempla* for Roman values. In public state art that place was taken either by scenes of Rome's own mythological and legendary past, or by contemporary events. In the domestic and funerary spheres, however, as the rest of the book shows, mythological images seem to have offered a wider range of possibilities, serving not just as signs of culture and refinement, and invitations to luxury and fantasy, but also as players within rhetorical debates and arguments about how to live in the changing world of Roman Italy.

Pompey's Portico

My first example is the portico and theatre complex dedicated by Pompey the Great to his patron goddess, Venus Victrix, in the mid-first century BC. This complex is a good example of the ways that art and architecture could be targeted towards the self-representation of ambitious individuals in the Late Republic, and the part that mythological images played within this. It provides the backdrop against which Octavian/Augustus' later use of art can be set, highlighting both continuities and changes between Republican and Augustan practice.

The portico was begun after Pompey's triumph over Mithridates of Pontus in 61 BC and inaugurated in 55 BC with lavish games.⁵⁷ The complex as a whole consisted of the first permanent stone theatre in Rome, with a temple to Venus at the summit of the *cavea*, and a large portico behind it (fig. 1.2). This space enclosed water, trees and artworks in a luxurious and harmonious whole.⁵⁸ While several ancient texts make passing references to the complex as a place of leisure, specifically evoking its erotic potential as a place to pick up girls, there are no detailed

⁵⁶ Especially Wallace-Hadrill 2008a; this is famously argued in the case of art by Zanker 1988.

⁵⁷ Cicero, *ad Familiares* 7.1.

⁵⁸ Gros 1999; for reconstructions see K. L. Gleason 1990, 1994.

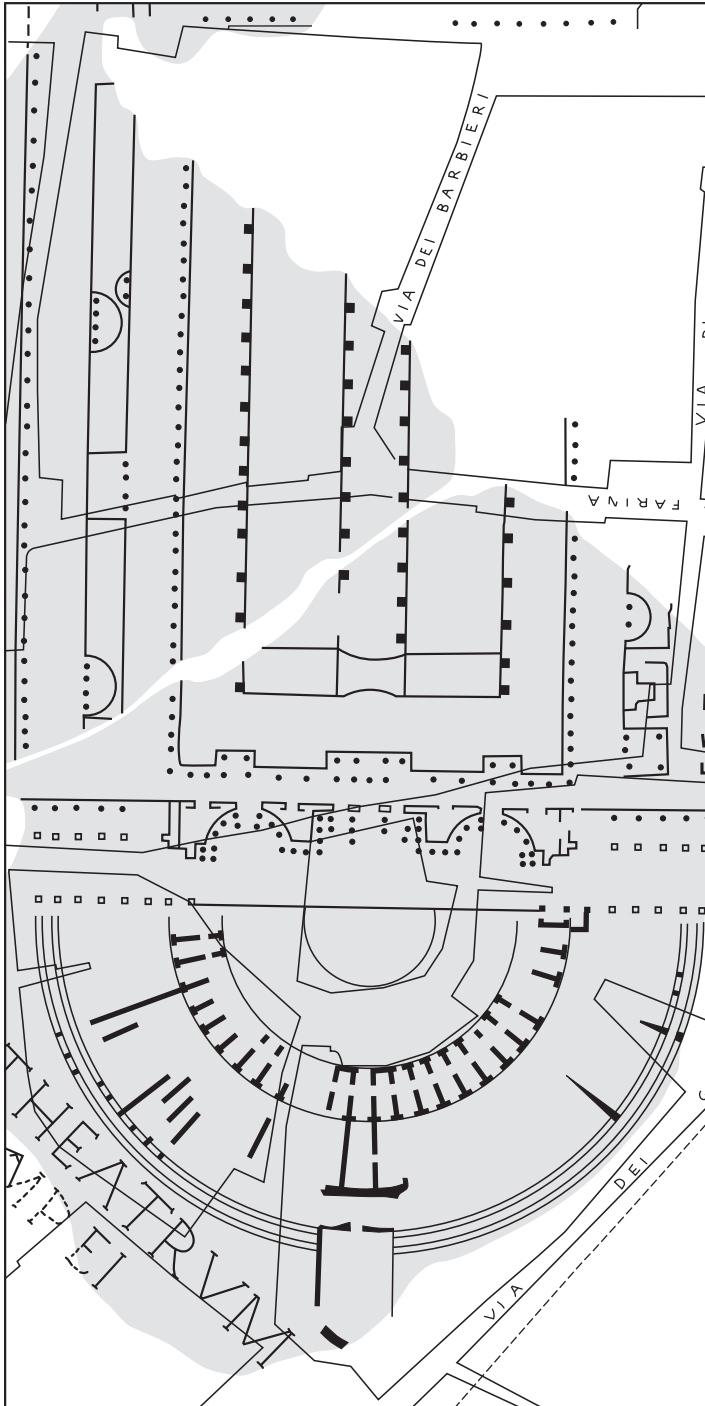


Figure 1.2 Map of Pompey's theatre and portico.

descriptions of it.⁵⁹ Our picture must be drawn from the scattered literary, epigraphical and archaeological evidence.⁶⁰

Pliny mentions a number of art-works displayed here, including celebrated marvels such as Eutycheis of Tralles, who gave birth to thirty children, and Alcippe, the mother of an elephant, as well as Coponius' fourteen statues of nations and a number of famous paintings on both historical and mythological themes.⁶¹ A later second-century AD work, Tatian's *Oratio ad Graecos*, also lists some of the images of unworthy women and men which the author claims to have seen in the city of Rome.⁶² The correspondence between some of these and those mentioned by Pliny suggests that Tatian was describing images he had seen in the portico of Pompey.⁶³

Coarelli reconstructed the display as focussing on three groups of women: poetesses and Muses; courtesans; and women associated with fabulous births, chosen for their links either with the cult of Venus or with the theatrical nature of the space.⁶⁴ DeRose Evans has suggested that these courtesans were, in fact, comedic heroines, celebrating theatrical culture.⁶⁵ In addition to historical figures, there were also a number of mythological subjects displayed in the portico, in both painted and sculpted form. Tatian lists a statue of Pasiphae by Bryaxis, as well as a representation of the myth of Europa, another woman seduced by a bull, this time the god Zeus himself.⁶⁶ The myth of Europa was also represented in the portico in a painting by Antiphilus, and it seems likely that other paintings by Nicias featured Calypso, Io and Andromeda.⁶⁷

Scholars have given a number of different readings of the messages of this artistic ensemble. In particular, Giles Sauron posited a complex reading of the sculptural programme as a recreation of a mythological journey to the Underworld, in which Pompey played the role of the heroes Odysseus and Aeneas, and also suggested an allusion to the Judgement of

⁵⁹ E.g. Catullus 55; Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 1.67; Martial, *Epigrams* 11.1; 11.47. Propertius 2.32.11–16 gives the most information, evoking the portico's Attalid tapestries, plane trees and springs.

⁶⁰ The account below relies especially on the work of Coarelli 1971–2; Sauron 1987; and Kuttner 1999a. See also Bravi 2012: 63–76.

⁶¹ Pliny, *Natural History* 7.34; 36.41; 35.59, 114, 126, 132. ⁶² Tatian, *Ad Graecos* 33.1–35.1.

⁶³ Tatian, *Ad Graecos* 34.1; 33.3. There are slight discrepancies in the names which are attributed to textual corruption; see Whittaker 1982: 63 nn. b, c.

⁶⁴ Coarelli 1971–2 comparing Tatian with archaeological finds from the area.

⁶⁵ DeRose Evans 2009. On statues of the Muses and poetesses see Kuttner 1999a: 361–2 linking an epigram by Antipater of Sidon to the portico (Gow and Page 1965, I: 17, no. 19).

⁶⁶ Tatian, *Ad Graecos* 33.3–4.

⁶⁷ Pliny, *Natural History* 35.114, 132. It is not entirely clear from Pliny whether these three paintings by Nicias were also in the portico; Pape 1975: 189 includes them, while Isager 1991: 135 does not.

Paris.⁶⁸ However, rather than seeking one tightly controlled single message, it seems more likely that the collection was intended to offer a looser series of messages commemorating the donor's wealth, power and achievements, and befitting the nature of this space as associated with the theatre and as part of a wider complex in honour of the goddess Venus. These messages would also have changed over time and for different audiences.⁶⁹ The statues of poetesses and Muses as well as (perhaps) comedic heroines celebrated culture and the life of the theatre, while Coponius' Nations and paintings on military themes (Polygnotus' image of a warrior, and Nicias' celebrated painting of Alexander) acted as analogies for Pompey's own military achievements.⁷⁰ In the series of miraculous births and mythological love stories we can instead see a message about the power of the patron of this space, the goddess Venus/Aphrodite.

The mythological Pasiphae links with the theme of the miraculous human births associated with Alcippe and Eutychis, since the product of her union with the bull was the Minotaur. However, she also serves as an indication of the power of love, a theme also exemplified by the tale of Europa and the bull. The three paintings by Nicias feature heroines all associated with mythological love stories; Calypso beguiled Odysseus, Io was seduced by Zeus and Andromeda was rescued by Perseus. Io and Andromeda appear frequently among the subjects of later Pompeian paintings, though it is unclear whether Nicias' painting showed Io with Argo, as in the House of Livia on the Palatine, or another episode of the myth.⁷¹ Io's transformation into a cow following her seduction by Zeus would have fitted well with the representations of bulls and cows elsewhere in the complex in the representations of the myth of Europa and in the story of Pasiphae, who may have been shown in the painting with the imitation cow made for her by Daedalus. These mythological women suggest that the overall programme of the complex went beyond the series of poetesses, prostitutes and mothers to encompass also the wider powers of the goddess Venus as manifested in the erotic encounters of mortals, heroes and gods.⁷²

⁶⁸ Sauron 1987. ⁶⁹ See esp. Kuttner 1999a on the changing resonances of the space.

⁷⁰ Pliny, *Natural History* 35.132. On Alexander as a model for Pompey see Michel 1967: 34–66.

⁷¹ Hodske 2007: table 3 gives figures for the myth at Pompeii.

⁷² Tatian also lists other mythological sculptures, such as Leochares' Ganymede, and representations of Eteocles and Polynices, as well as an image of the Sicilian tyrant Phalaris (who tortured his enemies within a bronze bull), some of which may also have been on display in the portico, though the Ganymede seems to have been displayed within the Temple of Peace: see Coarelli 1971–2: 103–4 and La Rocca 2001: 197.

Pompey's portico served to elevate its donor, representing him as a man of military success and of culture, who adapted the conventions of Hellenistic court art to serve his own self-representation and to praise his patron goddess, Venus.⁷³ The mythological images here fit in primarily as manifestations of the power of Venus, as well as carrying an intrinsic merit as art-works by famous artists, the treasures of the East brought by Pompey's military success to become the spoils of Rome. As we will see, many of these resonances continue in later displays, though with the addition under Octavian/Augustus of a stronger political allusion to recent events.

Augustan Myths: Power, *hubris* and *pietas*

Pompey's portico was one of a number of earlier monuments which underwent restoration during the age of Octavian/Augustus.⁷⁴ The complex's dedication to Venus, ancestress of the Julian gens, suited it for adoption by Julius Caesar's heir. Its collection of famously fertile women would also have had a resonance in the light of Augustus' later moral reforms; stories in Pliny and Suetonius suggest that Augustus was keen to use historical and contemporary *exempla* in his encouragement of procreation.⁷⁵ If the collection did include a series of famous *hetaerae*, these would appear to fit less well into the Augustan moral programme, but were perhaps now to be seen as negative *exempla* rather than as celebrations of Venus' power.⁷⁶

Elsewhere, too, a number of older complexes were refashioned in the Augustan period to serve as prestigious art collections. The new portico of Livia, built on the site of the house of the wealthy Vedius Pollio and now accessible to the public, was apparently 'sprinkled with ancient paintings', *priscis sparsa tabellis*.⁷⁷ Other gallery spaces include evidence of particular thematic links which could hold a group of images together, but which may also have had deeper symbolism relating to the new regime.⁷⁸

The portico of Octavia was an Augustan refurbishment of the earlier portico encompassing temples of Juno and Jupiter which Q. Caecilius

⁷³ On the influence of Hellenistic court art see Kuttner 1999a: 345–50; more generally 1995, 1999b.

⁷⁴ *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 20.1; on the rededication see Kuttner 1999a: 349–50, 354–5.

⁷⁵ Pliny, *Natural History* 7.60; Suetonius, *Augustus* 89.2.

⁷⁶ Note, however, that the Augustan poets revel in the erotic possibilities of the portico, suggesting that there could be a mismatch between popular perception and the moral reforms, e.g. Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 1.67 (the portico as a place to hunt girls).

⁷⁷ Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 1.71; Zanker 1987; 1988: 137–9; Panella 1999; Newlands 2002a.

⁷⁸ The key account remains Zanker 1988. See also Favro 1996; Galinsky 1996.

Metellus had built after his victory over Macedonia in 146 BC. Metellus had displayed his spoils there, including Lysippus' representation of Alexander's battle at the River Granicus.⁷⁹ Pliny lists a number of other artworks in this area, many of them probably added after Metellus' period, including statues by Pheidias, Philiscus and Praxiteles.⁸⁰ There was also a collection of Greek paintings, housed in a *schola*, probably an exedra around the edge of the portico. Pliny lists two works of Antiphilus here, a painting of Hesione and another showing Alexander and Philip with Minerva.⁸¹ Two other paintings by Artemon, showing Heracles going up to heaven and the story of Laomedon, may well also have been displayed in this same area of the portico.⁸²

If they were displayed together, they would have created a picture gallery or *pinacotheca* with a thematic grouping linking together some of the paintings.⁸³ Three of the four subjects identified can be associated with the deeds of Heracles. Artemon's painting of Laomedon and Antiphilus' image of Hesione both relate to the same myth: Laomedon had failed to pay the gods Apollo and Poseidon for their help in raising the walls of Troy and in punishment the gods sent a plague and a sea-monster. The latter could only be satisfied by the sacrifice of Laomedon's daughter Hesione, who was saved in the nick of time by Heracles. Artemon's painting of 'the story of Laomedon concerning Hercules and Neptune' probably showed Heracles' rescue of the girl, or the failure of Laomedon to pay him the promised reward, while Antiphilus' painting of Hesione may also have shown a detail of her exposure to the sea-monster, or her rescue by Heracles. The paintings could have been enjoyed for the two versions they offered of the same myth, inviting viewers to compare and contrast them.

Yet there might also have been a deeper resonance here to the figure of Heracles, whose apotheosis to heaven was shown in Artemon's second painting. Heracles often appears as a key model of courage, suffering and divinisation with whom to identify oneself, and the message here of divinisation through heroism was a powerful one, which would have continued to resonate at different periods.⁸⁴ This mythological *exemplum*

⁷⁹ Velleius Paterculus 1.11.3–4. For a description of the site see Viscogliosi 1999a and 1999b.

⁸⁰ Pliny, *Natural History* 36.15, 22, 35. On the history of Praxiteles' Eros which Pliny places here, see Pausanias 9.27.3 and Dio 66.24.

⁸¹ Pliny, *Natural History* 35.114: *in schola in Octaviae porticibus*.

⁸² Pliny, *Natural History* 35.139 lists them simply as *in Octaviae operibus* but a position alongside the other paintings in the *schola* seems probable. For further discussion see Pape 1975: 185–7.

⁸³ On *pinacothecae* see below, Chapter 3.

⁸⁴ See Hekster 2004 for a discussion of the significance of these images for Augustus; also Hekster 2005 on Heracles as a model for later emperors.

of courage and heroism was paired with a historical one, that of Alexander the Great, whose deeds were celebrated in the Granicus monument, while Antiphilus' painting stressed his links with divinity.⁸⁵ The images here can thus be read on a number of levels, appreciated both for their art-historical merits and for the underlying comparisons they offered to both Metellus and Augustus.

Another example of a public *pinacothecae* which included groupings of paintings on a particular theme is the portico of Philippus, built in the later first century BC around M. Fulvius Nobilior's temple to Hercules Musarum. The original temple had been dedicated after Nobilior's triumph over Ambracia in 187 BC. It housed a statue of Hercules, shown holding a lyre, as well as nine images of the Muses taken from Ambracia.⁸⁶ It also transferred an older shrine of the Camenae (the Italian Muses), believed to have been set up by Numa, from the earlier Temple of Honos and Virtus. The cult statue representing Hercules as a patron of culture had a particular resonance for Nobilior, who had taken the poet Ennius on his campaigns with him, suggesting an accommodation between war and art. This link is made explicit by Eumenius, writing at the end of the third century AD, who describes the mutual connection between Hercules and the Muses: *Musarum quies defensione Herculis et virtus Herculis voce Musarum*, 'the peace of the Muses is defended by Hercules, but the valour of Hercules is celebrated by the voice of the Muses'.⁸⁷ The temple and its decoration were consistent with the tradition of dedicating war booty to the gods, but also acted as a statement of the values held by Nobilior, expressing the belief that culture and martial valour could coexist, and indeed be mutually beneficial.⁸⁸

Here, the Greek Muses had been reappropriated to serve the self-representation of Nobilior, as a new kind of Roman general. Later too, in the refiguring of the portico in the Augustan period, we can see how

⁸⁵ On Alexander as a model for Roman generals see Michel 1967. For discussion of the references to Alexander in Augustus' Forum see Rutledge 2012: 252–3, 255–6.

⁸⁶ Viscogliosi 1996b gives full details; see also Pape 1975: 12–14; Martina 1981; Pietilä-Castrén 1987: 95–103. Most scholars see the Muses as statuettes, on the grounds of an inscribed base found in the area of the later Portico of Philippus, but Martina 1981: 50 suggests they could have been paintings; Pliny, *Natural History* 35.66 is ambiguous. The cult statue is shown on coins minted by Q. Pomponius Musa, dating to the early 60s BC: Crawford 1974: 1. 437, no. 410.1; pl. 50.21. See also Ovid, *Fasti* 6.812; *Ars Amatoria* 3.168.

⁸⁷ Eumenius, *Pro instaurandis scholis* 7.3. See also Cicero, *pro Archia* 27, linking Nobilior's dedication of military spoils to the Muses with his patronage of Ennius.

⁸⁸ Martina 1981: 63–6 sees the temple in part as Nobilior's rebuttal of the criticisms levelled against him by Cato. See also Heslin 2015: 202–7.

Greek art-works played a supportive role in creating the ideology of the new *princeps*. Pliny tells us that the portico contained a series of paintings by Theorus depicting the Trojan War, as well as others on mythological and historical themes, including Zeuxis' famous painting of Helen.⁸⁹ Since the portico was constructed in the late first century BC by a close relative of Octavian/Augustus, we can link the choice of themes to the political ideology of Augustus himself. Indeed, Peter Heslin's recent book asserts that the complex was a crucial part of Augustus' redesign of the city of Rome, functioning as a literary 'Museum' on the model of that at Alexandria.⁹⁰ Heslin argues that the paintings of the Trojan War that were displayed here may have been copied in the decorative programme of the Temple of Apollo at Pompeii.⁹¹ If so, they emphasised the role of Aeneas, a crucial figure for Augustus' own self-representation, and show Augustus' appropriation of the Trojan myth to act as a precedent for his own power, as well as to provide a founding myth for Roman society more widely.⁹²

The porticoes of Philippus and Octavia offered prestigious collections of art-works. While these could be enjoyed for their aesthetic merits, they also offered messages about the sponsors of the complexes, taking on new meanings at different times, for different masters. Elsewhere, we find displays of older art-works combined with new commissions, to create systematic programmes which seem very much tailored towards Octavian/Augustus' political needs. One of his earliest works was the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine. This was formally vowed in 36 BC during Octavian's battle against Sextus Pompey, but not completed and dedicated until 28 BC, by which time it also served to commemorate Apollo for his role in the Battle of Actium.⁹³ The complex as a whole consisted of the temple itself, a portico, and Greek and Latin libraries, all situated next to Augustus' own house on the Palatine.

Propertius' description of the new temple in *Elegy* 2.31 describes its decoration with mythological imagery. Images of the god standing between his mother and sister stood inside the temple; we learn from Pliny that they were original Greek masterpieces by the sculptors Scopas, Cephisodotus

⁸⁹ Pliny, *Natural History* 35.144. At 35.114 he lists three paintings of Antiphilos in the portico (showing Dionysus, the young Alexander and Hippolytus), and at 35.66 a Helen by Zeuxis. For details of the portico see Viscogliosi 1999c; Heslin 2015: 197–254.

⁹⁰ Heslin 2015: 207–11, 230–7. ⁹¹ Heslin 2015: 27–193, 238–422.

⁹² On Augustus' use of the Trojan myth see Zanker 1988: 193–5, 201–10; Galinsky 1996: 204–6, 319–21. Cicero, *De inventione rhetorica* 2.1–3 discusses Zeuxis' painting without indicating its location in his time.

⁹³ On the temple see Zanker 1983; Kellum 1985; Lefèvre 1989.

and Timotheus.⁹⁴ On the ivory doors of the temple two examples of the god's power were represented: the expulsion of the Gauls from Mount Parnassus and the deaths of the Niobids.⁹⁵ Here the historical and the mythological were paired to show Apollo's power to punish those who threatened his sanctuary or slighted him and his family. Yet there were also messages here about the god's protégé. Like Apollo, who with his sister had killed the Niobids to avenge Niobe's slur on his mother Leto, Octavian/Augustus had taken vengeance against those who had murdered his adoptive father Julius Caesar. In the case of the Gauls, Apollo acted to defend his sanctuary against barbarian invaders. Here too an allusion to more recent events could be seen, with Octavian's victory over Antony and Cleopatra reconfigured as a war against a barbaric foe, defending the morals of Rome against the threats posed by a foreign power.⁹⁶

A similar combination of mythological messages can be seen in the decoration of the Temple of Apollo in the Circus, refurbished by C. Sosius. Sosius was initially an ally of Antony, but the final dedication of the temple seems to have occurred after Actium and his pardoning by Octavian.⁹⁷ The display of a reused Greek Amazonomachy in the pediment of the temple can be read as a metaphor for Augustus' successes in the East; the battle of the Greeks and the Amazons offering a parallel to the Roman victory against a warrior queen.⁹⁸ The same temple also contained a group of the Niobids, of which Pliny comments that it is unknown whether the sculptor was Scopas or Praxiteles.⁹⁹ It seems likely that the group was brought into Rome either during the Augustan period or before. It was an appropriate dedication for the god, exemplifying his power to punish those who slighted him. Under Augustus it would have suggested the same range of meanings as the image of the Palatine doors, expressing not only the power of the god, but also that of his imperial protégé, as well as acting more generally as the spoils of victory reused for the ornamentation of Rome.

Returning to the Palatine complex, the nearby portico also used myth to assert both a general and a contemporary message.¹⁰⁰ It was decorated

⁹⁴ Propertius 2.31.15–16; Pliny, *Natural History* 36.25, 24, 32.

⁹⁵ Propertius 2.31.12–14. On the exemplary potential of the Gauls for Romans, see A. Stewart 2004: 150–2.

⁹⁶ Compare Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.698–700 where Cleopatra is shown at Actium supported by monstrous Egyptian gods.

⁹⁷ Viscogliosi 1993, 1996c. ⁹⁸ La Rocca 1985; Zanker 1988: 84.

⁹⁹ Pliny, *Natural History* 36.28.

¹⁰⁰ For discussions of the portico see Kellum 1985; Lefèvre 1989; Tomei 1990; Balensiefen 1998; Quenemoen 2006; and Leach 2008.

with statues of the Danaids, along with their father Danaus. The literary texts suggest that Danaus was shown with a drawn sword, illustrating the moment in the myth when he urges his daughters to kill their cousins and husbands-to-be on their wedding night.¹⁰¹ Tomei has suggested that the Danaids should be identified with a series of female figures that were discovered in 1869 by Pietro Rosa during excavations in the cryptoporticus to the north and east of the temple. Three of these can be identified with the female herms in *nero antico* now displayed in the Museo Palatino (fig. 1.3), while others in red marble are also mentioned in the excavation reports.¹⁰² They showed the women as caryatids, with some shown raising an arm to an object on their heads, the other grasping their skirts. Rather than showing the girls in the act of murder, they seem instead to allude to the expiation of their crime in the Underworld, where they were compelled to keep filling leaky vessels with water. However, the calm pose and expression of the figures suggest that this is not a representation of anguished torment, but rather the necessary expiation of past sins through service to the god.¹⁰³

Scholars have suggested a number of different readings of the significance of the Danaids in the portico of Apollo. Some point to Vergil's description of the murder in the *Aeneid* as *nefas*, a crime, to suggest that the Danaids are here shown as negative *exempla*, warning against such acts of impious murder.¹⁰⁴ Yet in the opposition of Danaus and his brother Aegyptus it is also possible to see an allusion to the conflict between Octavian and Antony and Cleopatra. In some versions of the myth, the Egyptians seem to have been shown as the aggressors.¹⁰⁵ In this case the Danaids would have been acting in self-defence, justified in their deed, although this fraternal bloodshed still required an act of expiation. The myth offered a parallel to Octavian's own situation, justifying his attack on Antony and the Egyptian queen Cleopatra. The fact that Danaus and Aegyptus were brothers also allowed an echo to the sorrows of the civil war and suggested that these required the sort of atonement which the new Augustus' religious reforms were aimed at achieving.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 1.73. Other references to the Danaids: Propertius 2.31.4; Ovid, *Amores* 2.2.4; *Tristia* 3.1.61–2.

¹⁰² Tomei 1990. Note, however, that some scholars reject this association: Häuber 2014: 573–4 n. 23 gives full references and discussion.

¹⁰³ More generally on the Danaids see Keuls 1974.

¹⁰⁴ *Aeneid* 10.497; Kellum 1985: 173–5; Balensiefen 1998.

¹⁰⁵ Hyginus, *Fabulae* 168. See Lefèvre 1989: 12–16. A late text, the scholia to Persius 2.56, suggests that equestrian statues of the bridegrooms were also present, though this seems unlikely.

¹⁰⁶ Galinsky 1996: 220–2.



Figure 1.3 Female herms in black marble, probably the Danaids which decorated the portico of the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine. Rome, Museo Palatino inv. 1048, 1056, 1053.

A further reference to Antony can be seen in the terracotta plaques that decorated the precinct.¹⁰⁷ Some of these show Heracles and Apollo competing for control of the Delphic tripod (fig. 1.4). Antony had adopted Heracles as a patron god, alongside Dionysus, while Octavian linked

¹⁰⁷ Carettoni 1971–2; Strazzulla 1990.

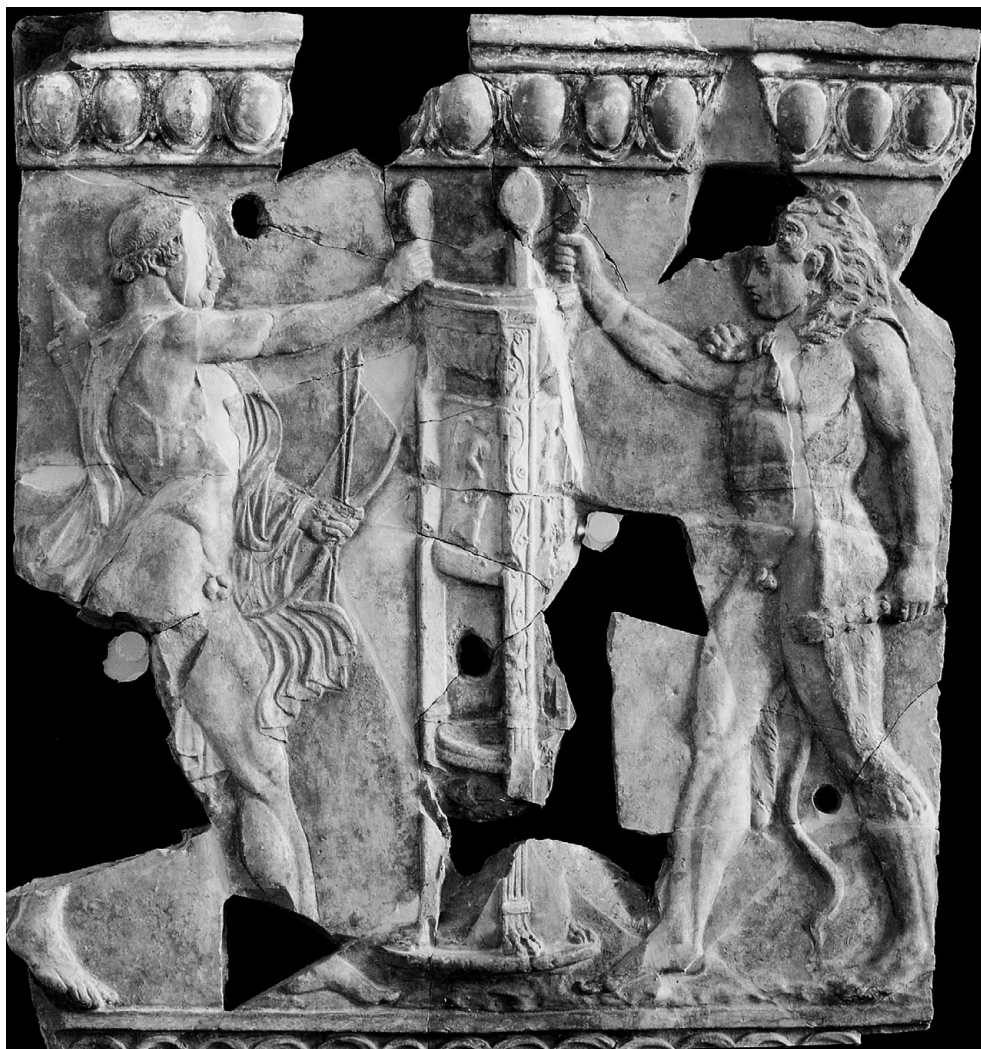


Figure 1.4 Terracotta plaque showing the contest between Apollo and Heracles, from the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine. Rome, Museo Palatino.

himself to Apollo.¹⁰⁸ We can see the plaques as alluding to the rivalry between the gods and their human protégés; a rivalry which had by now already been settled in Octavian/Augustus' favour.¹⁰⁹ After Actium Octavian had also tried to win over Antony's supporters to his cause, pardoning

¹⁰⁸ Zanker 1988: 44–53.

¹⁰⁹ Kellum 1985: 170–1; Favro 1996: 100. See Schneider 1986: 61 on the link between the presence of Victory on a plaque in Paris and imagery celebrating the victory at Actium.

their previous opposition. The balanced representation of the two gods on the plaque also hints at accommodation, now that Antony was safely out of the way, suggesting that there was a place even for Heracles in the new Augustan religious sphere.¹¹⁰ Indeed, in other contexts Augustus can also be seen taking Heracles and Dionysus as his own patron gods.¹¹¹

This study of the myths displayed in the Temple of Apollo suggests a range of readings and significances. As we saw in Pompey's portico, myths could celebrate the actions of the patron deity, as on the doors with their images of the Gauls and Niobids, or on the plaques showing the struggle over the tripod. Yet at the same time they could also work here as metaphors for recent political events, or serve as moral warnings. While historical friezes were often used on Roman public monuments to celebrate particular military victories, for events that were rather more contentious, such as the victory over Antony, myth offered Octavian a way of exploring ideas of victory, vengeance and rehabilitation in a sensitive and nuanced way.

This use of myth as an analogy to recent historical events can be seen earlier in Greek state art, such as on the metopes of the Parthenon where the myths of the Trojan War, Centauromachy, Gigantomachy and Amazonomachy can be read as allusions to the Athenians' own battles against the barbarians in the form of the Persians.¹¹² The Attalids of Pergamum took up this model in their own victory monuments, as on the so-called 'Lesser Attalid monument' on the Athenian Acropolis which combined battles against giants, Amazons and Persians, with the Attalid defeat of the Gauls, as well as on the gigantomachy frieze of the Great Altar at Pergamum.¹¹³ Hellenistic royal culture had a profound influence on Late Republican forms of self-representation in Rome, and these models may have influenced Octavian's choice here of Greek myth as a means for political allusion.¹¹⁴ Yet there were also dangers in this approach. As scholars have noted, the myth of the Danaids can be interpreted in a variety of ways, some of which might have worked against Octavian's interests. In its very flexibility and subtlety, myth allowed for the possibility that some would not understand the message, or would deliberately

¹¹⁰ Galinsky 1996: 222–4. Strazzulla 1990: 17–22 also discusses the reliefs.

¹¹¹ Schneider 1986: 32–4. ¹¹² Boardman 1996: 148.

¹¹³ On the Attalid dedication at Athens and its copies see the comprehensive account by A. Stewart 2004. Scholarship on the Great Altar is vast; for useful overviews see Pollitt 1986: 97–110; A. Stewart 2014: 105–13. Cf. also the mythological analogies to the filial piety of the Attalids included on the temple set up to their mother Apollonis at Cyzicus, *Palatine Anthology* 3.

¹¹⁴ See especially Kuttner 1995, 1999b.

misconstrue it. This led in later works to a shift away from Greek myth to Roman subjects, which could be more closely tied to Augustus' political agenda.

As Paul Zanker has shown, Octavian's early use of art can be seen as clearly emerging from the traditions of Late Republican self-representation. His association with the god Apollo is in line with Republican practice whereby Roman generals imitated Hellenistic kings in associating themselves with particular gods or heroes.¹¹⁵ Like earlier commanders, he had vowed a temple to his chosen deity during a battle and then embellished it with captured art-works as well as newly commissioned images. The Temple to Apollo on the Palatine was vowed during the battle against Sextus Pompey at Naulochus in 36 BC, even though it was not finally completed and dedicated until 28 BC.¹¹⁶ The decision to embellish this precinct with libraries can be seen in part as a form of rivalry with other Republican benefactors, such as Asinius Pollio whose *Atrium Libertatis* had served as Rome's first public library.¹¹⁷ Elsewhere, Octavian's dedication of Apelles' painting of Aphrodite Anadyomene (probably part of the booty from Alexandria) in the Temple of the Divine Julius and his restoration of Pompey's theatre and portico continued Julius Caesar's stress on Venus as the ancestress of the Julian gens.¹¹⁸ This linkage was fully in line with earlier claims by elite families to be descended from particular gods or heroes.¹¹⁹ However, the tone of Octavian/Augustus' use of mythological images was also distinctive, and orientated towards his own personal needs after Actium to present himself both as the victor over Antony and Cleopatra, and as the herald of a new era of peace and piety in Rome. It is this new need to promote communal Roman virtues that may have led Augustus to move away from Greek myths towards Roman subjects in his later projects.

Pietas was one of the four virtues recorded on the *clipeus virtutis* granted to the newly named Augustus by the senate in 28–27 BC. This golden shield was set up in the new Curia Julia and praised Augustus for his manifestation of *virtus* (valour), *clementia* (clemency), *iustitia* (justice) and *pietas* (piety).¹²⁰ Augustus' programme of religious renewal, including his oversight of the rebuilding or new construction of eighty-two temples in the

¹¹⁵ Zanker 1988: 33–77.

¹¹⁶ See Pietilä-Castrén 1987 on the Republican monuments. Augustus also vowed the Temple of Mars Ultor during the Battle of Philippi; see below.

¹¹⁷ See n. 49 above for bibliography.

¹¹⁸ On the painting see Pliny, *Natural History* 35.91.

¹¹⁹ See Wiseman 1974.

¹²⁰ *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 34.2. Zanker 1988: 95–7; Galinsky 1996: 80–90.

city of Rome, was a clear sign of this *pietas*.¹²¹ Another was his close association with the figure of Aeneas, whose portrayal as *pius* Aeneas, the man who sacrifices much to accept his destiny in bringing the gods of Troy to the land of Latium, was cemented by Vergil's *Aeneid*.¹²² Despite his Trojan origins, Aeneas appears in Augustan art very much as a Roman figure. By this time Aeneas had been long claimed as a founder of the city, alongside the native Romulus.¹²³ While the eastern origins of his son, Iulus/Ascanius, can be stressed in art through Trojan dress, Aeneas appears instead in Roman dress, as a worthy model for Augustus himself.¹²⁴ Augustus' piety is compared to that of Aeneas on the Ara Pacis, where the hero is shown sacrificing to the *penates* he has brought to Italy (fig. 1.5). The representation of Augustus on the south frieze evokes the figure of Aeneas compositionally through his stance, veil and laurel wreath (fig. 1.6). The pendent panel to Aeneas showed Romulus and Remus being suckled by the she-wolf.¹²⁵

Both Romulus and Aeneas reappear again in the Forum of Augustus and show how Augustus used representations of mythological founders to assert his own place in the wider history of Rome.¹²⁶ The Forum was centred around the Temple to Mars Ultor, initially vowed to the god during the Battle of Philippi, in which Octavian fought the assassins of his father Julius Caesar, but only finally dedicated in 2 BC. By this time the appellation Ultor, the Avenger, encompassed a much wider range of associations, including the successful return to Rome in 20 BC of the standards previously captured by the Parthians, which were subsequently placed in the temple.¹²⁷ As the father of Romulus and Remus, Mars was the legendary founder of the whole Roman race, and was shown here alongside Venus, ancestress of the Julian gens. Family and national ancestry were combined to present Augustus as the rightful heir to the long past of Rome.

¹²¹ *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 20.4. ¹²² *Aeneid* 1.10; 1.544–5; 6.403; Galinsky 1996: 89.

¹²³ On the Trojan origins of Rome see Gruen 1990: 11–16; 1993: 6–51, though note Erskine 2001: 15–43 on the importance of the Julii in putting this tradition at the heart of Rome's communal identity. On the representation of Rome's foundation myths in art, see Aichholzer 1983 and Dardenay 2010.

¹²⁴ On the easternness of Rome's Trojan origins, see Schneider 2012: esp. 97–111 on Ascanius. On the Roman representation of Aeneas on the Ara Pacis and Forum Augustum see Zanker 1988: 201–7.

¹²⁵ See Zanker 1988: 203–7; Galinsky 1996: 141–55; Pollini 2012: 204–70, esp. 219–28.

¹²⁶ For discussions see Zanker 1968; 1988: 194–203; J. C. Anderson 1984: 65–100; Galinsky 1996: 197–213; Spannagel 1999; Geiger 2008; Dardenay 2010: 80–107; and pp. 325–6, below.

¹²⁷ Ovid, *Fasti* 5.580–94.



Figure 1.5 Relief showing Aeneas sacrificing, Rome, Ara Pacis.



Figure 1.6 Detail of the south side of the Ara Pacis, showing Augustus in procession.

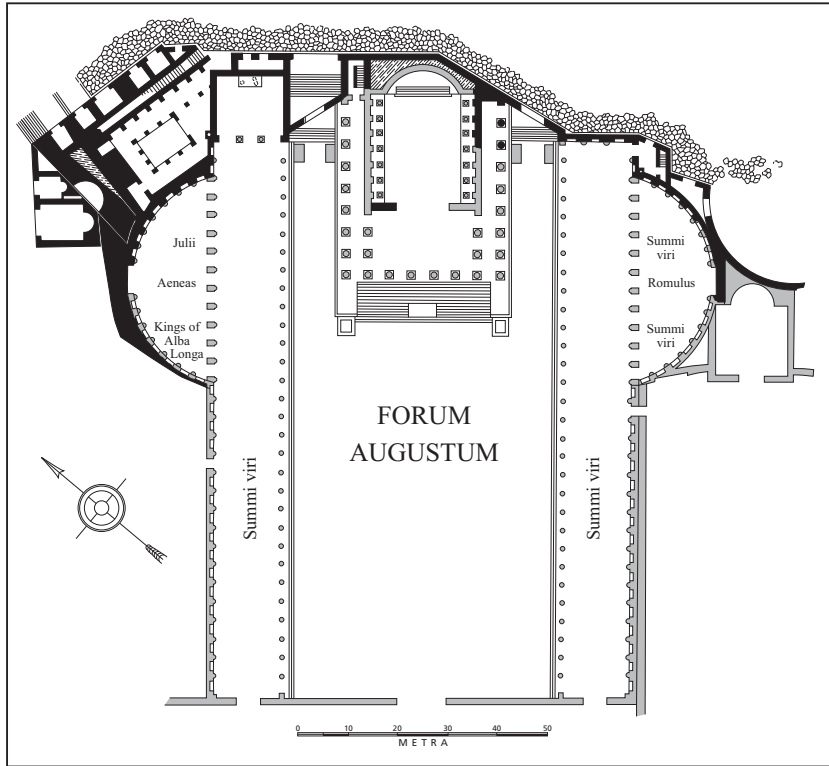


Figure 1.7 Plan of the Forum of Augustus.

The figures of Romulus and Aeneas occupied the central exedrae in the long colonnades either side of the temple, heading up a series of famous *exempla* from the past (fig. 1.7). Ovid describes Mars looking out over Aeneas, the ancestors of the Julian race, Romulus and a series of statues of famous men.¹²⁸ Suetonius explicitly says that Augustus was keen that these should be seen as models both for his own behaviour and for that of all future emperors, and he is credited by Pliny with actually writing the *elogium* for Scipio Aemilianus.¹²⁹ Excavations have revealed fragments of the statues, shown either in togas or cuirasses, as well as the *tituli* and *elogia* that accompanied them, identifying their most important deeds (fig. 1.8).¹³⁰ On one side lay Aeneas,

¹²⁸ *Fasti* 5.563–7.

¹²⁹ Suetonius, *Augustus* 31.5; Pliny, *Natural History* 22.13. For a comparison with Augustus' *Res Gestae* see Frisch 1980.

¹³⁰ For details see Degraffi 1937: 1–36; Zanker 1968: 14–18; J. C. Anderson 1984: 80–8.

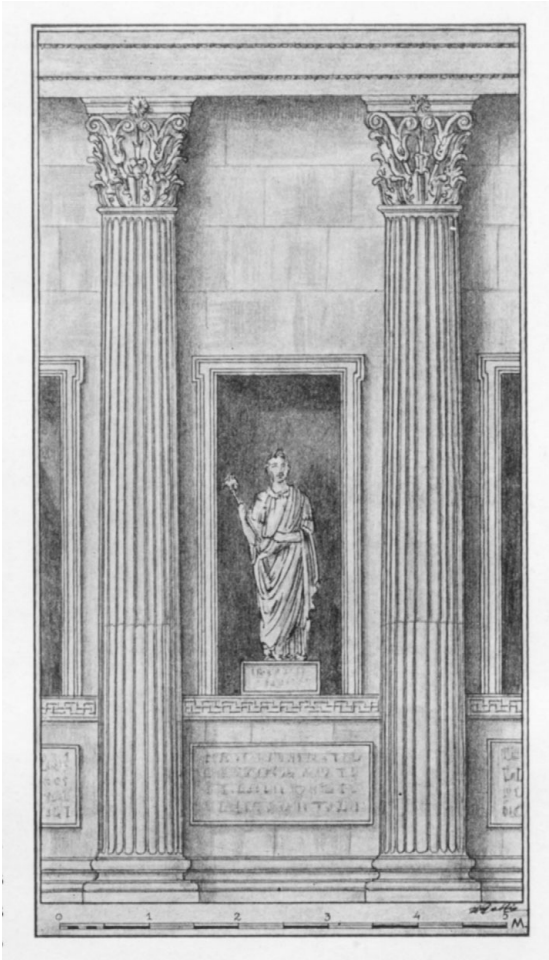


Figure 1.8 Reconstruction of statue in the Forum of Augustus.

heading up a series of figures from the Julian gens, while on the other Romulus led a parade of the most important figures from Republican history, including prestigious first-century BC figures such as Marius, Sulla and Lucullus.¹³¹ Another important historical example, Alexander the Great, was commemorated in the Forum through two paintings by Apelles that were placed here, as well as by the placement at the entrance

¹³¹ Note that a similar line of famous predecessors appeared in Augustus' funeral cortege, including Pompey the Great, not otherwise attested in the Forum: Dio 56.34.2–3.

to the temple of two of the statues that had served Alexander as tent posts.¹³²

The imagery of the Forum thus presented Augustus as the rightful heir to the entire history of Rome, in a manner analogous to the foreshadowings of Roman history which we find in the *Aeneid*.¹³³ Here, we see how the past has inexorably led up to this one man, as the embodiment of all the virtues and qualities of the greatest men not just of his own family, but of the whole of Roman history. As with the Temple on the Palatine, historical and mythological *exempla* merge to assert a unified message; there of the power of Apollo to punish the *hubris* of those who challenge his authority, here of Augustus as the rightful heir to the position of supreme *auctoritas* in the Roman state. In the art-works chosen to achieve these effects we can find the display and reuse of the *spolia* of battle – the paintings of Alexander, the cult statues on the Palatine, and the Amazonomachy pediment of the Temple of Apollo Sosianus – as well as the commissioning of new works such as the Danaids and parade of Roman worthies in the Forum.

Yet there were also differences between the imagery of the Palatine and that in the Forum. The Palatine complex has a much stronger Greek mythological aura, asserted through the use of Greek originals as cult statues, the replicas of Myron's famous cow around the altar, and the representation of mythological figures such as the Danaids.¹³⁴ While the significance of the choice of site may have been influenced by the Palatine's role in the origins of Rome – as the site of the cave in which Romulus and Remus were suckled, Romulus' legendary hut and Evander's first settlement – the decoration of the temple complex seems to have concentrated on Greek mythological imagery rather than details from the history of Rome.¹³⁵ In the Forum, the Roman connections were much stronger, despite the inclusion of some Greek elements, such as the Caryatids adorning the attic.¹³⁶ While the presence of Aeneas leading his father and son out of Troy alludes to the distant past of the Trojan War, the concentration is firmly on the founding myths of the Roman state. Aeneas here is the

¹³² Pliny, *Natural History* 35.93–4 (noting that Claudius later replaced the head of Alexander with that of Augustus); 34.48.

¹³³ Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.756–846; 8.626–728. On the comparison with the *Aeneid* see Degraffi 1945; Galinsky 1996: 206, 210–11. Luce 1990 looks instead at the parallel use of *exempla* by Livy, arguing that Augustus consciously chose alternative versions of these men's lives and achievements.

¹³⁴ Propertius 2.31.7–8.

¹³⁵ For a consideration of the celebration of Rome's legendary past by Augustus see Rea 2007.

¹³⁶ Zanker 1988: 257–8.

start of the Julian race, while the *triumphator* Romulus leads the line of historical Roman figures, who appear to have been shown in the traditional Roman dress of toga or cuirass, rather than in mythological ideal nudity.¹³⁷ These differences may be explained by the different requirements of a Forum, where the business of senate and state was to be held, vis-à-vis the religious sanctity of the Palatine temple.¹³⁸ But there is also a sense of a chronological movement away from the multiple messages of Greek myth to a much narrower representation of key figures from Roman history as models for Augustus himself.

Greek myth may not have been completely absent from the Forum, however. In addition to the statues of Mars and Venus in the pediments of the Temple of Mars Ultor, standing as ancestors respectively of Romulus and Aeneas, the mythological story of the erotic relationship between the two also seems to have been represented in the Forum. Kousser identifies a fragmentary statue group as showing Venus embracing Mars, in a statue type that was later adopted for the representation of both imperial and non-imperial married couples.¹³⁹ She interprets the long space of time between this statue and the second-century funerary images as suggesting that this statue was later deemed to have been a mistake. The erotic allusion to the union of Mars and Venus may have proved dangerously malleable to misreading, as an image of infidelity which was at odds with Augustan morality. As we have seen above with the images of Medea and Ajax in Julius Caesar's Forum, an ideological appropriation of Greek myth could be dangerous, allowing the potential for misreadings, as well as for positive associations with the aims of the regime.¹⁴⁰

The same potential for alternative readings was also true of Romulus, whose murder of his brother made him a potentially flawed model.¹⁴¹ Yet as Hölscher has noted, in Augustan public art we find a reduction in meanings of Romulus, by which he appears either as one of the twin babies suckled by the she-wolf, an image that had a long history of representing Rome's communal identity, going back at least to the early third century

¹³⁷ Zanker 1988: 202, fig. 156.

¹³⁸ Cf. Lamp 2013: 58–79 tying the Roman *exempla* displayed in the Forum of Augustus to its use as a space for rhetorical displays.

¹³⁹ Ovid, *Tristia* 2.295. See Kousser 2008: 47–54; also Zanker 1988: 195–9 with different emphasis.

¹⁴⁰ Rutledge 2012: 28–9, 231–3 notes the potential for variant readings of collections; see also Edwards 2003: 59–62.

¹⁴¹ Edwards 1996: 43.

BC, or as a figure of military *virtus*, carrying the *spolia opima*.¹⁴² Aeneas too was shown primarily as a figure of *pietas*, manifested either towards his family, as in the scene of him carrying his father out of Troy, or towards the gods, as in the scene of sacrifice on the Ara Pacis. The wider narratives of these two mythological figures recede in favour of their emblematic quality as representatives of the key Roman virtues of *virtus* and *pietas*, as well as their genealogical connection to the city of Rome and Augustus, in particular.

Exemplarity in Roman Public Art

In a number of articles Tonio Hölscher has asserted the exemplary character of Roman public art.¹⁴³ From the late fourth century BC onwards temples were erected to abstract virtues such as Honos, Virtus, Salus and Fides, often at the instigation of individual victorious generals. These temples implicitly commemorated the virtues embodied by the donor, which were raised to divine status.¹⁴⁴

Other types of public art can also be read as asserting the abstract qualities that were manifested through particular actions. Hölscher suggests that the narrative scenes which appear on a mid-Republican tomb on the Esquiline probably reflect the painted descriptions of battles that were carried in public triumphs. While the precise events depicted in the tomb are unclear, scholars generally agree that they reflect recent military events, possibly a victory over and truce with the Samnites.¹⁴⁵ Hölscher reads the scenes as representing specific Roman virtues: the treaty scene exemplifies Roman *fides* (trustworthiness), domination over conquered enemies shows *clementia* (clemency), sacrifice *pietas* (piety) and battle *virtus* (male courage/virtue).¹⁴⁶

This continuing focus on individuals as embodying particular virtues valued in Roman culture can be seen under Augustus with the *clipeus virtutis*, and also in later state art. Thus historical reliefs such as those on Trajan's column manifest the abstract qualities of the emperor in stock scenes, which are, however, embedded into the wider historical

¹⁴² Hölscher 1993: 80–7, esp. 82; see also Zanker 1988: 203. A statue group of the twins and the she-wolf was set up by the Ogulnii brothers in 296 BC: Livy 10.23.11.

¹⁴³ Hölscher 1978, 1980, 1993, 2008.

¹⁴⁴ Hölscher 1978: 349; Fears 1981; Beard, North and Price 1998: 62, 90.

¹⁴⁵ Hölscher 1978: 344–8; see also Holliday 2002: 83–91. ¹⁴⁶ Hölscher 1978: 347–8.

narrative.¹⁴⁷ By the Antonine period particular actions could be clearly excerpted to stand for individual virtues, as we find on coin issues labelling scenes showing the emperor receiving the submission of barbarians as *Clementia Aug*, ‘the clemency of the emperor’.¹⁴⁸ As Rodenwaldt’s work on the *Vita Romana* sarcophagi showed, the abstraction of virtues was also taken over into funerary art, with scenes of battle, clemency, sacrifice and marriage representing the abstract virtues of *virtus*, *clementia*, *pietas* and *concordia*.¹⁴⁹

These examples suggest that from the mid-Republic onwards historical events could be read as manifesting the virtues which lay at the heart of Roman self-identity. Indeed, much recent work on the place of exemplarity in Roman culture has shown how the actions of past individuals were recorded and redisplayed to serve as continuing exemplars of ideal forms of behaviour, which were also aimed at encouraging the emulation of these acts and values in the next generation.¹⁵⁰ In the later chapters we will see how Greek myths came to provide a framework within which social values could be discussed in domestic and funerary contexts. There Roman myths are generally lacking, though a few exceptions are discussed in the Epilogue. In public art, however, the opposite seems to have been true. Here it was Roman myth that provided a way to think about communal values and identities.

We have already seen the central role which Rome’s foundation myth played in Augustan art. In the Forum of Augustus Romulus and Aeneas appear almost as historical figures, tracing the lines of worthy predecessors all the way back to the mythological past.¹⁵¹ Elsewhere, too, we can find the portrayal of scenes from the legendary history of Rome used to assert moral ideas, as in the frieze of the Basilica Aemilia in the Roman Forum. Though fragmentary, the frieze clearly depicted individual episodes from the early history of Rome, including the Rape of the Sabine Women and the Punishment of Tarpeia (fig. 1.9).

The date of the frieze has been debated. The Basilica was first opened in 179 BC and rebuilt in the early first century BC. A recent analysis also

¹⁴⁷ See especially Hölscher 2008: 44–6, with greater nuance than 1980: 290–7.

¹⁴⁸ E.g. Hölscher 1980: 286–8. For a detailed discussion see Noreña 2011.

¹⁴⁹ Rodenwaldt 1935; Hölscher 1980, 2008. On these sarcophagi see also Wrede 2001; Muth 2004; Reinsberg 1995, 2006.

¹⁵⁰ E.g. Polybius 6.53–4 on elite funerals. Roller 2004 is a particularly insightful account. On exemplarity in history see especially Chaplin 2000 on Livy. For further discussion see Epilogue below.

¹⁵¹ On the difficulties of dividing myth and history see Finley 1974.



Figure 1.9 Punishment of Tarpeia, detail of the frieze from the Basilica Aemilia. Rome, Palazzo Massimo.

suggests extensive rebuilding in the Augustan period after a fire of 14 BC.¹⁵² Some scholars have dated the frieze to the early first century, but there are also a number who would place it in the later first century, in the rebuilding post-14 BC.¹⁵³ Indeed, in its presentation of episodes from the early history of Rome the frieze can be linked both to Livy's legendary history and to other examples of Augustus' promotion of Rome's past. Albertson and Kampen, in articles published almost simultaneously, both suggest that these scenes from Rome's past are used to assert the moral legislation of Augustus' regime and promote traditional moral values. The rape of the Sabine women is related to Augustus' marriage legislation, while the model of Tarpeia is seen as a negative *exemplum*, warning of the dangers of infidelity and thus promoting Augustus' crackdown on adultery.¹⁵⁴ These scenes can also be read as a warning, of the dangers of female sexuality and of the need to keep it under control, offering an analogy to and justifying Augustus' control of female sexuality in the services of the Roman state.

This use of myth as a negative *exemplum* can also be seen in some of the uses of Greek myth by Augustus and, later, Domitian. In Augustan contexts the myth of Niobids appeared in both the Temple of Apollo Sosianus, in

¹⁵² Freyberger et al. 2007.

¹⁵³ Albertson 1990; Kampen 1991; Freyberger 2010: 31–9. Dardenay 2010: 55–77 suggests an earlier date.

¹⁵⁴ Albertson 1990; Kampen 1991.



Figure 1.10 Detail of architrave from Domitian's Forum, Rome, showing the myth of Arachne.

the form of a sculptural group, and on the doors of the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine. We can see the myth as acting as proof of the power of the god, celebrating his power and ability to wreak vengeance on those who slight him or his family. Yet it also offers a didactic message; through the provision of a negative *exemplum* (the *hubris* of Niobe), it warns others to choose piety instead and to appreciate the power of the gods.

A similar use of myth can be seen again at the end of the first century AD in the frieze from the Forum Transitorium started by Domitian, in which his patron goddess Minerva is celebrated through images of her associations with weaving and household tasks.¹⁵⁵ These images of women dutifully engaged in domestic work serve as models of virtue, thrown into relief by the myth of Arachne, who is shown being punished by the goddess for her temerity in comparing her own achievements to those of a goddess (fig. 1.10). As Eve D'Ambra has comprehensively shown, the relief stresses

¹⁵⁵ D'Ambra 1993a. On the Forum as a whole see J. C. Anderson 1984: 119–39.

the moral concerns of Domitian's reign, and uses myth to warn of the punishments which accrue to those daring to put themselves above the gods.¹⁵⁶ As in the Precinct of Apollo on the Palatine, the myth celebrates the complex's patron deity but also reflects on the commissioning emperor's own regime.¹⁵⁷ Here, the concentration on female domestic virtues and the punishment of Arachne's *hubris* suggest Domitian's desire to secure his reputation as a staunch upholder of the *mos maiorum*, willing to punish those who flouted the law.¹⁵⁸

Yet while myths here symbolise the power of the gods, and act as warnings of the proper behaviour, we rarely find cases where other mythological figures are portrayed as positive role models in public art, in the way that we have seen Aeneas appearing on the Ara Pacis and in the Forum Augustum. Andrew Stewart raises two possible cases that are worth exploring here. In a paper comparing the effect of Hellenistic baroque-style sculptures on mythological themes with the effects of tragedy, Stewart suggests that such sculptures were primarily designed to elicit fear and pity. However, he also singles out two statues which, he suggests, may have served as moral *exempla*: the Hercules Tunicatus and the White Marsyas type.¹⁵⁹

The Hercules Tunicatus is known only from Pliny's descriptions of it in the *Natural History*. Pliny tells us that this statue must not be overlooked, despite the fact that its sculptor is unknown. It stands near the Rostra and shows Hercules wearing the poisoned tunic, the only example of him in this dress known in Rome. Hercules is described as *torva facie sentiensque suprema tunicae*, 'with a grim face and feeling the extremes of the tunic'.¹⁶⁰ Pliny also describes the three inscriptions which accompanied the statue, showing that it was part of the spoils taken by Lucius Lucullus, had been dedicated by his son, and had been restored to public display from private ownership by Titus Septimius Sabinus when he was curule aedile.¹⁶¹ The final sentence of Pliny's account sums up: *tot certaminum tantaque dignationis simulacrum id fuit*, 'this was an image of so many contests and such great dignity'. This sentence has often been taken to refer to the statue's chequered history, manifested in its movement to and from public display detailed in the inscriptions. But it can also be taken, as

¹⁵⁶ D'Ambra 1993a: 49–60. At 73–7 she makes suggestions about other myths that could have featured on the rest of the frieze.

¹⁵⁷ D'Ambra 1993a: 90–6 discusses the parallels with the Temple of Apollo.

¹⁵⁸ See Grelle 1980 on Domitian's moral legislation.

¹⁵⁹ A. Stewart 2006; see also von den Hoff 2004 on the emotional effects of sculptural groups, which are explored further in Chapter 2.

¹⁶⁰ Pliny, *Natural History* 34.93. ¹⁶¹ For discussion see Pape 1975: 48–9.

Stewart does, to refer to the content of the statue and to Hercules' contests and his dignity in the face of death.¹⁶²

Stewart suggests that the statue showed Hercules enduring the intense pain of the poisoned tunic that would bring about his death, and thus acted as a Stoic model of endurance in the face of suffering and the struggle over passion.¹⁶³ The difficulty, of course, is to know whether Hercules was here shown as offering a stoic resistance to his sufferings, or instead with his face twisted in agony. That both expressions were possible is shown by Stewart's analysis of the two versions of the hanging Marsyas type.¹⁶⁴ Of these he sees the so-called red version (below, [fig. 1.14](#)) as illustrating Marsyas' crazed reaction to pain, reinforcing the image of him as a deserving victim whose barbarian *hubris* brings upon him divine nemesis, while the white type, with its calmer face, exemplifies instead patience and stoicism in the face of pain. Thus the two statue types, while superficially very similar, could be seen as representing two very different versions of Marsyas, one a deserving victim of the god's anger, the other a hapless victim raised by his attitude to pain to a moral victory over the vengeful Apollo. As Stewart well notes, both versions can be found in contemporary literature; it was up to poets and artists, and their patrons, to decide which one was preferred.¹⁶⁵ Yet whatever the intention of the artist, responses to such statues are also, always, subjective. Indeed, in a very different reading of the hanging Marsyas statues, Luca Giuliani has suggested that it was the white version, rather than the red, which most exemplified the sense of pain.¹⁶⁶ Giuliani pays particular attention to the postures of the statues, whereas Stewart focuses more on their faces – depending on where one chose to look, an ancient viewer too might have found the potential for a number of different messages.

While it is possible that some of the mythological figures and events depicted elicited a reading as positive moral *exempla*, in the majority of

¹⁶² Compare A. Stewart 2006: 150, 'a *simulacrum* of so many battles and such great *dignitas*', with Rackham's Loeb translation (1952), 'So many were the rivalries connected with this statue and so highly was it valued'.

¹⁶³ A. Stewart 2006: 154. ¹⁶⁴ A. Stewart 2006: 142–4, 154. On Marsyas see further below.

¹⁶⁵ The same poet can use the myth in conflicting ways. Compare Ovid, *Fasti* 6.706 with *Metamorphoses* 6.832–400 where the violence seems excessive: Tissol 1997: 125–9; Murgatroyd 2005: 245–7. Note also that the expressions of Marsyas can vary even between replicas of the same type: e.g. the face of the Karlsruhe statue illustrated by A. Stewart 2006: [fig. 4.11](#) differs noticeably from Palazzo Conservatori inv. 1977 (here [fig. 1.14](#)) even though both follow the same composition. See Weis 1992: [figs. 7 and 9](#) for good illustrations. Some caution is required, however, as it is unclear how extensively the Conservatori statue has been restored (Weis 1992: 193–4).

¹⁶⁶ Giuliani 2006: esp. 36 n. 4. Compare Muth 2009 on responses to the Laocoon statue.

examples this does not seem to be the case. Instead, where we do have mythological sculpture groups to analyse, the overriding impression is one of pain and drama, eliciting an emotional reaction from viewers which reminded them of the powers of the gods to look after their own interests, and of the frailty of men.¹⁶⁷ Mythological events might also be used as analogies for contemporary politics, expressing on a metaphorical level ideas which could not be stated more literally. Yet this very capacity for myth to be read as meaning something else could be a liability in some situations, allowing its messages to be reread in another way. This may explain why Augustus in his later art preferred to use the Roman figures of Aeneas and Romulus, whose meaning for a Roman audience was already heavily codified and continued to become more so under Augustus. Future emperors too seem to have preferred to avoid mythological allusions in public state art, with the exception of Domitian whose decision to decorate his Forum with scenes of Artemis' divine wrath reinforces his power and moral programme. Figures of individual gods and heroes continue to feature, but through their attributes they often act as representatives of abstract virtues, removed from a narrative context, and indeed can be complemented or replaced by personifications, such as those of the figures of Virtus or Concordia.¹⁶⁸

Making Greek Myth Roman? The Case of Marsyas

We have seen in this chapter how the art-works displayed in the city of Rome could be used to illustrate Rome's military power, and turned to the self-representational needs of their patrons and viewers. Both style and content carry meaning. Mythological themes could be used as *exempla* of the powers of the gods, or as warnings of the punishment of *hubris*, while the stylistic registers in which they were depicted could also carry resonance: original art-works acted as proof of Rome's conquests, while newer creations in classical or Hellenistic styles could also carry with them the cachet of Greek artistic prestige. Each new image was set against a backdrop of earlier displays, adding extra resonances and often helping to change the tones of these collections. Competing images of the same mythological figures could also appear, inviting interpretation of what these figures now meant in a Roman context.

¹⁶⁷ These ideas are discussed further in [Chapter 2](#) below, and in Newby 2012.

¹⁶⁸ On the importance of personifications of virtues see Noreña 2011.

In order to conclude this chapter I want to return briefly to the question of the distinctions between ‘Greek’ and ‘Roman’ that were discussed in the Introduction, through an analysis of two very different representations of the figure of Marsyas: the statue in the Roman Forum, and statues of the hanging Marsyas type. We have already seen how Stewart interprets the latter type, known in two main variants (the ‘red’ and the ‘white’) as expressing either the just punishment of a barbarian usurper, or his stoic suffering in the face of divine power. The statue in the Forum adds another meaning to the person of Marsyas, reconfiguring him as a communal Roman emblem of liberty. The contrast between these two types shows the potential for Greek mythological figures to be either incorporated fully into Roman identity, or to maintain their sense of distinctiveness, and the ideological means to which both types could be put.

The traditional account of the myth of Marsyas has the satyr pick up the flutes abandoned by Athena and foolishly challenge the god Apollo to a contest of musical skills. Apollo wins, and flays Marsyas alive to punish his *hubris*.¹⁶⁹ The satyr’s punishment is vividly suggested by the statue type of the hanging Marsyas, tied to a tree as he awaits his flaying, a number of versions of which come from contexts in and around Rome (see below, [fig. 1.14](#)).¹⁷⁰

Yet there was also another version of Marsyas’ story, in which he escaped the wrath of Apollo and fled to Italy, founding the Marsi tribe of the Central Apennines.¹⁷¹ A statue of Marsyas was placed in the Roman Forum, perhaps early in the third century BC.¹⁷² It appears on a coin minted by L. Marcius Censorinus, probably in 82 BC ([fig. 1.11](#)). Both Torelli and Coarelli suggest that the original statue was set up by one of Censorinus’ ancestors, perhaps C. Marcius Rutilus, at the time of his first censorship in 294 BC.¹⁷³ It also appears on the so-called Anaglypha Traiani reliefs of the early second century AD, along with the fig tree in the Forum ([fig. 1.12](#)).¹⁷⁴ Copies of the statue were set up in Roman colonies; according to the fourth-century AD commentator Servius they served as a

¹⁶⁹ See Small 1982 and P. B. Rawson 1987 for accounts of the myth and its visual representation.

¹⁷⁰ For discussions of the statue type and its variants see Meyer 1987; Weis 1992; and Maderna-Lauter 1999.

¹⁷¹ Silius Italicus 8.502–4.

¹⁷² The date is based on the style of the copy at Paestum, discussed below, as well as historical factors; see esp. Torelli 1982: 102–5 and Coarelli 1985: 36–8, 91–123. Veyne 1961 and Small 1982: 68–92 also discuss the significance of the statue, but note the objections of Coarelli 1985: esp. 95–100.

¹⁷³ Torelli 1982: 102–5, with previous bibliography; Coarelli 1985: 95–100.

¹⁷⁴ Torelli 1982: 89–118, esp. 98–106.



Figure 1.11 Silver denarius of L. Marcius Censorinus, c. 82 BC, showing the statue of Marsyas in the Forum. Yale University Art Gallery 2001.87.1480.

symbol of the freedom guaranteed by Marsyas' patron god, Liber Pater.¹⁷⁵ One such statue was found in the Forum at Paestum, founded as a Roman colony in 273 BC.¹⁷⁶ Like the statue shown on Censorinus' coinage, the statue had a raised right arm and the remains of shackles around its legs (fig. 1.13). It probably also carried a wineskin over the left shoulder, as shown on the coin and reliefs.

The meanings of the statue have been much debated, and may indeed have changed over time. Coarelli's detailed analysis notes in particular the presence of the shackles on the figure's legs, as well as the diadem around his head.¹⁷⁷ He associates the erection of the statue with the political circumstances of the late fourth and early third centuries BC, and in particular with the privileges granted to the plebeians and the laws passed to counter problems of debt. C. Marcius Rutilus was the first plebeian to enter into both the colleges of the augurs and the pontifices, and held the censorship twice, gaining him the cognomen Censorinus, which was passed on to his descendants. Coarelli suggests that he was also responsible for the Lex Marcia against money-lenders. He sees the shackles on the statue as presenting Marsyas as a former slave, once bound

¹⁷⁵ Servius, *ad Aen.* 3.20; 4.58.

¹⁷⁶ Coarelli 1985: 95–6. Another fragmentary statue has been found at Alba Fucens: Liberatore 1995. Similar statues are attested for the imperial period especially in Asia Minor and North Africa; see Small 1982: 127–42 and Thomas 2007: 147–8.

¹⁷⁷ Particularly clear on Coarelli 1985: figs. 13–17 and fig. 20.



Figure 1.12 Detail of the so-called *Anaglypha Traiani*, showing the statue of Marsyas in the Forum. Rome, Forum Romanum.

but now free, suggesting that the statue embodies the liberation offered by the *Lex Marcia* from the problems of debt.¹⁷⁸ He also suggests a possible genealogical link between the Marci and Marsyas, which influenced the choice of this figure both in the statue and in the later coinage of C. Marcius Censorinus.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Coarelli 1985: 100–12.

¹⁷⁹ Coarelli 1985: 113–19, also noting the association of both Marsyas and the gens Marcia with augury. Small 1982: 68–92 associates the statue entirely with augury, but this undervalues the importance of the fetters, which she sees as boots.



Figure 1.13 Statue of Marsyas from the Forum at Paestum. Paestum, Museo Archeologico Nazionale.



Figure 1.14 Statue of the hanging Marsyas. Rome, Palazzo dei Conservatori inv. 1977.

While the statue may originally have commemorated freedom from debt slavery in particular, it also seems to have been associated early on with communal freedoms. In Rome these were especially associated with the plebeians, and indeed Wiseman, in particular, notes how Marsyas' patron god, Liber, was the patron of plebeians.¹⁸⁰ Outside Rome the statue

¹⁸⁰ Wiseman 2004: 68–9; 2008: 99–100, 128–34. See also Torelli 1982: 104 describing the statue as a 'witness of the plebeian *libertas*' and a 'symbol of the freedom that the *plebs* had progressively acquired through the conquest of offices and priesthoods'.

seems to have stood as an emblem of the Roman state more generally, as suggested by its presence in the Fora at Paestum and Alba Fucens in the third century BC. While late, Servius' comment that the statue served in cities around the Roman world as a 'symbol of liberty', *libertatis indicium*, seems likely to have applied to the earlier period too, even if this freedom was limited, being that of a Roman colony, and could be mocked by some.¹⁸¹

While Coarelli has brilliantly explained the Marsyas statue in the light of contemporary politics, there has been much less attention on how this Roman Marsyas compares to the figure from Greek myth. Yet this statue gives us a chance to compare the appropriations of Greek mythological figures in Roman art, and to look at the extent to which they could be transformed or still carry aspects of their original identity. Again, the shackles are the key. While the suggestion that these are a reference to debt slavery is certainly persuasive, Wiseman rightly notes that there must also be reference here to Marsyas' musical contest with Apollo.¹⁸² They suggest that Marsyas was shackled by Apollo pending punishment, but that he managed to escape his gruesome fate. The wineskin over Marsyas' left shoulder has received little discussion, apart from Small's suggestion that it alludes to the provisions required on Marsyas' journey.¹⁸³ A much more likely allusion, however, as Rawson recognises, is to Marsyas' patron god, Liber, who like his Greek counterpart Dionysus was closely associated with wine.¹⁸⁴ Servius calls Marsyas the *minister*, 'attendant' of Liber, and says that he is under his protection, *in tutela Liberi patris*.¹⁸⁵ The combination of shackles and wineskin on the statue suggests that Marsyas escapes Apollo through the protection of Liber, to embark on a new life in Italy. The use of shackles to allude to Marsyas' threatened punishment, rather than the bound hands which are common on representations of the Greek myth, likens his situation to debt slavery. The Greek myth is changed to a Roman one, but it still remains in the background, as the grisly punishment from which Marsyas has escaped. As well as visualising the incorporation of Marsyas into Roman mythological history, the very form of the statue

¹⁸¹ Charax of Pergamon (Jacoby 1926: 2A, no. 103, fr. 31) in the second century mocks the statue with its fetters as symbols of servitude rather than freedom; see Coarelli 1985: 92–3. It is interesting that he does not identify it as Marsyas, just as a Silenus figure, which may show that this Italian rendering of Marsyas was illegible to Greek eyes.

¹⁸² Wiseman 2008: 99. ¹⁸³ Small 1982: 77.

¹⁸⁴ P. B. Rawson 1987: 12 drawing on Charax's description of statues of Silenoi carrying wineskins (Jacoby 1926: 2A, no. 103, fr. 31). He also suggests a symbolic association with Marsyas' flayed skin, but this is less persuasive.

¹⁸⁵ Servius, *ad Aen.* 4.58; 3.20.

also asserts its independence from the Greek tradition. The long body and stumpy legs of the Paestum statue are alien to the forms of classical naturalism or Hellenistic baroque, and conform instead to what has been called Italic or plebeian art.¹⁸⁶ Both in its style and its content this Marsyas is a very Roman figure.

The statue of Marsyas in the Forum thus represents the transformation of a Greek mythological figure, who was an example of the power of the gods and the perils of *hubris*, into a Roman one, who can stand instead for liberation through that most populist of gods, Liber. It posed a challenge to the Greek myth in which Marsyas met a grisly fate for daring to oppose Apollo. Yet versions of the flaying of Marsyas were also common in Rome, certainly at a later period.¹⁸⁷ Instead of considering the flayed and the liberated Marsyas types separately, as scholarship tends to have done, it is worth thinking about the effect of competing versions of Marsyas within the visual landscape of Rome.

The hanging Marsyas statue exists in two main variants, commonly known as the ‘white’ and the ‘red’, though there is some blurring between them. Anne Weis has suggested that the ‘red’ type (which she sees as the older) may first have been commissioned by Sulla, in the wake of his successful march on Rome, and set up in the Temple of Apollo in the Circus Flaminius (fig. 1.14).¹⁸⁸ The violence of the statue certainly fits well with Sulla’s biography: he had previously conquered the Marsi tribe in 90 BC, and brutally murdered some 6,000 captives in the Circus Flaminius in 82 BC. If he were responsible for erecting the statue, it could have been read as an allusion to those past actions and a warning to his opponents not to dispute his new ascendancy. It suggests that Apollo is on Sulla’s side, not that of his opponents.¹⁸⁹ Such a statement could have been in deliberate opposition to the use of Apollo by the Marian cause. Luce has suggested that supporters of Marius often featured Apollo on their coinage, as indeed we see on the coin of L. Marcius Censorinus, which shows the statue of Marsyas in the Forum (fig. 1.11).¹⁹⁰ If Sulla did set up

¹⁸⁶ The term *arte plebea* (plebeian art) was notably coined by Bianchi Bandinelli (e.g. 1970: 51–69); for more recent responses see de Angelis et al. 2012.

¹⁸⁷ Weis 1992: 117. Sixteen statues in her catalogue are likely to come from Rome and its environs, though many lack precise provenances.

¹⁸⁸ Weis 1992: 57–83. Note, however, that Meyer 1987 reached different conclusions on the origins of the two types.

¹⁸⁹ See Plutarch, *Sulla* 29.6; Gagé 1955: 434–42; Weis 1992: 70–1.

¹⁹⁰ E.g. Luce 1968: esp. 29–30. Censorinus’ brother was a prominent opponent of Sulla: Plutarch, *Sulla* 5.6; Appian, *Civil Wars* 1.8.71; 1.10.93. Crawford 1974: 377–8, no. 363 rejects a political meaning for the coin, linking the presence of the statue to the moneyer’s name. For other

a statue of the hanging Marsyas type, we can see these two representations of Marsyas in opposition to one another: Censorinus' coin celebrates the Roman Marsyas, a symbol of liberation and freedom from debt, as well as offering a play on the moneyer's name; Sulla's Marsyas is instead the crushed victim of an avenging power, a telling warning to those who might dare to oppose Sulla himself.

Weis' attribution of the 'red' type to Sulla is, however, unproven, and the surviving replicas of the type seem to date from a later period. Indeed, the visual opposition between the liberated and punished Marsyas statues might have taken on a particular resonance under the reign of Augustus. Peter Wiseman has suggested that Liber and Apollo are often pitted against one another, and that Augustus, as the protégé of Apollo, shows a discomfort or even hostility to the worship of Liber.¹⁹¹ Augustus is quoted as objecting to the garlanding of the Forum Marsyas by his daughter Julia, and the statue was also identified as the site of her adulterous assignations.¹⁹² It serves as a cipher for licentiousness and opposition to Augustus' strict moral programme.

Weis suggests that Augustus avoided the myth of Marsyas, perhaps because it was associated with Sulla.¹⁹³ But the myth does appear on some Augustan-period objects, such as an altar found in the Roman theatre at Arles, in France, and the statue found near the Auditorium of Maecenas in the *Horti Maecenatis* (fig. 1.14; the findspot is shown on pl. 1).¹⁹⁴ This has been dated to the Augustan period, and Chrystina Häuber suggests that it was the original statue of this type, commissioned by Maecenas in support of Augustan ideology.¹⁹⁵ Like the examples of the Gauls and the Niobids, which featured on the doors of the Temple of Apollo, the punishment of Marsyas could also serve as a supreme *exemplum* of the god's power to punish those who dared to oppose him. Yet Marsyas' gruesome punishment could also be seen as extreme; this may have made it less desirable for Augustus to display in a public temple or forum. In public, at least, he preferred to identify Apollo as the bringer of peace and restorer of society, as celebrated in the *Ludi Saeculares*.¹⁹⁶ In the semi-private world

interpretations see Torelli 1982: 102–5 (ancestry); Coarelli 1985: 111–13 (reference to debt problems and the admission of the Marsi to Roman citizenship).

¹⁹¹ Wiseman 2008: 128–34.

¹⁹² Pliny, *Natural History* 21.8; Seneca, *De beneficiis* 6.32.1.

¹⁹³ Weis 1992: 81–3. ¹⁹⁴ On the altar see Espérandieu 1907: 117–18, no. 138.

¹⁹⁵ Häuber 2014: 611–26. Weis 1992: no. 39 dates it more widely as Julio-Claudian. See further below, pp. 116–20, on the Laocoon group, found in the same area.

¹⁹⁶ Suetonius, *Augustus* 70.

of the *horti*, however, as we shall see in the [next chapter](#), the possibilities were wider, and myths such as that of Marsyas or the Niobids could reinforce imperial power, while also evoking a voyeuristic thrill from their contemporary viewers.

By the time of Augustus, if not before, two opposing representations of Marsyas could be seen in the cityscape of Rome, and continued to exist into later centuries.¹⁹⁷ These two images show competing ideas – the liberation of Marsyas through the god Liber, and his power to function as protector of the rights of the people and allied cities, versus the conquered satyr, brutally punished for his audacity at daring to challenge the power of the god Apollo. The first acts as a symbol of communal identity, binding together the people of Italy under the protection of the god of freedom and wine, the second aligns a prominent individual (perhaps Sulla, and certainly Augustus) with the god Apollo to assert his authority. Here the Roman version does not displace the original Greek version, but the two coexist side by side, indicating the flexibility of myth to be reinterpreted and tailored to individual needs, and showing, in the contrast between the *Horti Maecenatis* statue and Julia's connection with the Forum Marsyas, how myth could be reappropriated for very different ends.

This chapter has shown how mythological images initially entered Rome in the form of booty, to be displayed in both public and private spaces as part of the expression of Roman power and personal prestige. Along with other art-works, mythological images could be valued for their aesthetic qualities, as high-value objects associated with particular famous artists from the past. Yet their content could also hold meaning. The display of mythological events associated with individual gods acted as honorific statements, illustrating the powers of Venus/Aphrodite in the portico of Pompey, or Apollo in his temples in the Circus and on the Palatine. They could also carry political messages, through the analogies set up between mythological and historical events, as with the Danaids on the Palatine. Yet we have also seen the potential pitfalls of this, the multivalency of myth allowing it to be read in ways that could also go against the intentions of the donor. It was probably due to recognition of this that Augustus chose in later art to focus more clearly on Roman myth, appropriating both Aeneas and Romulus as Roman mythological founders and as personal

¹⁹⁷ The Forum Marsyas may have been displaced at the end of the second century AD by the Arch of Septimius Severus, though numismatic and epigraphical evidence for Marsyas statues in the provinces in the third century suggests that it was probably still visible somewhere in the Roman Forum. See Torelli 1982: 102; Coarelli 1985: 36–8.

exempla. Later state art shows a preference for historical themes, through which the exemplary virtues of the emperors could be manifested, with the exception of the moralising mythological *exemplum* of Arachne in Domitian's Forum. Where mythological images do appear, they seem to be located in the semi-private world of imperial *horti* and *domus*, as well as in the recreational sphere of the public baths, areas that were open to a wider public, but could encompass the delights of *otium*, as well as the needs of public self-representation. It is to this sphere that I turn in the [next chapter](#).

2 | Recreating Myth in the Roman Villa

At the same time lived Cydias, whose painting ‘the Argonauts’ the orator Hortensius bought for 144,000 sesterces, and he made a shrine (*aedem*) for it in his villa at Tusculum.

Pliny, *Natural History* 35.130

When I was at Q. Hortensius’ villa in the Laurentine countryside I saw there a more Thracian scene. For there was a wood of over 50 *iugera* enclosed by a wall which he used to call not a *leporarium* (hare enclosure) but a *therotrophium* (wild beast enclosure). In it was a high spot where was placed the table at which we were dining, to which he ordered that Orpheus be called. When he appeared with his robe and harp, and was bidden to sing, he blew a horn; and there poured around us such a crowd of stags, boars and other animals that it seemed to me to be no less attractive a sight than when the hunts of the aediles take place in the Circus Maximus without the African beasts.

Varro, *De re rustica* 3.13 (Axius speaking)

In the [previous chapter](#) we saw how Greek art-works on mythological themes could be taken into public display at Rome and used for both their value as prestigious pieces of art and the political and ideological messages they could convey. The first of the two anecdotes above about the wealthy Late Republican orator Hortensius shows how similar forms of display could be found in the private sphere. Hortensius’ construction of a special shrine to display an expensive ‘old-master’ painting bears comparison with the public display of paintings in the porticoes of Octavia and Philippus in Rome. Elsewhere, Varro attests to the fashion for dining in *pinacothecae* (picture galleries) in elite villas.¹ The singling out of a particular painting, bought at a high price, suggests that Hortensius valued it as a masterpiece of fourth-century Greek art, and probably wanted his artistic connoisseurship, along with his wealth, to be recognised and appreciated by his contemporaries. The

¹ Varro, *De re rustica* 1.59.2.

mythological content signalled his education, and could also have served as a prompt for rhetorical displays of erudition by the host and his guests.

The second anecdote, however, reveals a rather different use of mythological imagery. Here we are told about a theatrical masque in which the myth of Orpheus was recreated for the entertainment of Hortensius' dinner guests. While Hortensius used a human actor to recreate the myth, material remains show that similar tableaux could be recreated in painting, sculpture and mosaic.² It is this imaginative use of mythological imagery that is the focus of this chapter.

Earlier work on Roman luxury villas has shown the ways that villa architecture and decoration created a world of *otium*, leisure, away from the day-to-day business of Roman political life, which could still, however, play an important role in the creation of an owner's desired self-representation.³ Through his masque of Orpheus, Hortensius was able to draw his guests out of their contemporary experience into a recreation of the woods of Thrace, but in doing so, also to suggest his own wealth and authority, through his recreation in a domestic setting of a quasi-public spectacle.⁴

The villa was a place where it was fashionable to surround oneself with Greek art and culture, to partake in intellectual and philosophical debates, and to indulge in exotic imported luxuries.⁵ The architecture and decoration of villas enhanced their luxury role, defining the atmosphere of particular spaces to accommodate different sorts of activities.⁶ In addition to some older art-works, the sculptural display of villas included numerous new statues often collectively termed *Idealplastik*—representations of gods, heroes, athletes, Muses and mythological figures depicted in the forms of Classical and Hellenistic Greek art. Whereas earlier scholarship was largely directed towards studying these images for what they could tell us about lost Greek art-works of the Classical or Hellenistic period, more recent work has sought to move away from the traditions of *Kopienkritik*,

² E.g. the garden painting in the House of Orpheus at Pompeii, VI, 14.20. For an extensive list of examples see Garezou 1994: 90–6.

³ For discussions of the Roman luxury villa see D'Arms 1970; Mielsch 1987; A. Frazer 1998; and Zarmakoupi 2014 with useful review of scholarship at 1–13. On the domestic sphere more generally as a stage for self-representation see especially Wallace-Hadrill 1988, 1994; Clarke 1991; Hales 2003; Leach 2004.

⁴ For a comparison with contemporary spectacle culture see Leach 2004: 132.

⁵ On imported luxuries, see Wallace-Hadrill 2008a: 356–440. ⁶ Zarmakoupi 2014.

to focus instead on the new meanings such statues could have in their Roman settings.⁷

In his seminal work cataloguing the sculptural display of Roman villas in Italy, Richard Neudecker argued that statues were primarily used within the villa as appropriate décor, to define the specific atmosphere desired in various architectural spaces.⁸ Thus bath complexes often feature the gods of health and beauty – Asclepius, Hygeia and Aphrodite – as well as the well-toned physiques of athletes and heroes, while peristyles could house portraits of intellectuals and other figures from the Greek past.⁹ This, indeed, is the approach evident in the letters written by Cicero to Atticus, in which he asks his friend to procure statues and other furnishings for his villas, especially for the ‘Academy’ he is constructing in his villa at Tusculum.¹⁰ Cicero stresses the need for his statues to be *gymnasiōdē*, suitable for a gymnasium, which here is specifically an intellectual space, named after the Academy in Athens in which Plato had taught. While he applauds particular choices, such as a herm of Athena, generally Cicero seems content for Atticus to use his own judgement.¹¹ His concern for appropriateness is revealed particularly in a letter to another agent, Gallus, who has bought the wrong sorts of statues:

But where am I going to put Bacchantes? Pretty little things, you may say . . . My habit is to buy pieces which I can use to decorate a place in my palaestra, in imitation of lecture-halls (*gymnasiorum*). But a statue of Mars! What can I, as an advocate of peace, do with that?¹²

Gallus’ Bacchantes and statue of Mars are here attacked as alien to the sense of peaceful intellectual pursuits which Cicero wishes to present.

Cicero is primarily concerned with the subject matter of his purchases, and seems relatively unconcerned about their artistic or aesthetic merits.

⁷ On *Kopienkritik* see Hallett 1995 and Fullerton 2003; on the problems of identifying Roman copies see Ridgway 1984 and Marvin 1997 with useful discussion in P. Stewart 2003: 231–49. A crucial start to considering the Roman context of classicising statues was made by Zanker 1974. More recently see Gazda 2002; Perry 2005; Kousser 2008; and Marvin 2008. For an insightful analysis of the large Herculaneum woman statue type, which has relevance for the study of other common types, see Trimble 2011.

⁸ Neudecker 1988. For a brief earlier account on similar lines see Zanker 1979b: 284–9.

⁹ Neudecker 1988: 31–104. On baths see also Manderscheid 1981; on the display of athletic subjects in villas see Newby 2005: 88–140.

¹⁰ Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 1.7; 2.2, 3; 4.2; 5.2; 6.3–4; 7.3; 8.2; 9.3; 10.5, numbered after Shackleton-Bailey 1965. They are collected and discussed in Marvin 1993; see also Pollitt 1983: 76–9; Neudecker 1988: 8–18; Koortbojian 2002: 175.

¹¹ Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 2.2, 4.2, 5.2, 6.4, 10.5.

¹² Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 7.23, trans. Shackleton Bailey 1978: 361–2, no. 209.

Yet as we saw at the start of this chapter, his contemporary, Hortensius, was so proud of his ownership of a prestigious panel painting that he made a special shrine within which to display it. Sculptures too could attract appreciation for their aesthetic and art-historical merits, the extremes of which are shown by Verres' voracious collecting of antiquities during his governorship of Sicily.¹³ New statues might also have been appreciated for their aesthetic qualities, especially when they directly copied or evoked a famous art-work of the past, as in the case of copies of Polycleitus' Doryphorus or Diadoumenus, or Myron's Discobolus.¹⁴

The circumstances of display played a crucial role here. When sculptures were displayed in an architectural context, as a series of discrete statues, they could evoke the effect of a portico or art gallery and elevate the tone of the space by the allusion to the decoration of public religious sanctuaries, such as those in Rome. In other contexts, however, the setting of statues drew attention instead primarily to their subject matter. This is especially true of mythological subjects, many of which were displayed in gardens.¹⁵ Evidence from Campania has shown that mythological figures were often displayed in close association with landscape features, set into plantings, beneath trees or overlooking pools.¹⁶ The landscaping would have helped to invigorate these sculptures, investing them with a sense of movement, for example by showing them reflected in the ripples of a body of water, enhancing their illusionistic pull.¹⁷

The luxury villa was a place where a rich Roman could show off his immersion into all aspects of Greek culture, from intellectual delights such as literature and philosophy to more luxurious or sensual pursuits.¹⁸ Art-works could act both as symbols of the patron's own qualities and

¹³ Cicero, *In Verrem* 2.4. See Miles 2008: 105–217.

¹⁴ The Diadoumenus and Discobolus are explicitly mentioned as being among the statues on display in a house in Athens, the setting of Lucian's *Lover of Lies* (18). For a sensitive discussion of the role of connoisseurship in artistic ensembles see Koortbojian 2002; also Pollitt 1978; Bartman 1988 and 1991; Neudecker 1988: 18–28, 91–114; and 1998; P. Stewart 2003: 224–31.

¹⁵ For further discussion of the impact of landscaped settings of violent myths, see Newby 2012.

¹⁶ E.g. the figures of a resting satyr and Hermes at either end of the pool in the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum: see Neudecker 1988: 105–14 and 147–57, esp. 111–12. For different interpretations of this much-discussed ensemble see Pandermalis 1971; Sauron 1980; Wojcik 1986; Warden 1991; Warden and Romano 1994; Dillon 2000; Mattusch 2005, 2010; see summary in Zarmakoupi 2014: 41–4. At Oplontis statues were displayed under trees along the east side of the pool, while the statues of Centaurs from the north garden originally flanked the central path amid plantings of oleanders, plane trees and box hedges: Jashemski 1979: 289–314; 1987; de Caro 1987; Neudecker 1988: 241–2, no. 71; Bergmann 2002.

¹⁷ A similar effect is described for a statue group of Diana and Actaeon in Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2.4. See further Newby 2012: 358–63.

¹⁸ See Zarmakoupi 2014 on the resonances of different spaces within the villa.

interests and as transportative agents. This can be seen in the statues Cicero seeks for his palaestra; he wants these to express his own self-representation (as a man of culture and peace) but also to summon up a particular famous setting, that of Plato's Academy in Athens. The same dual role can be seen for mythological images too. We can read these both as symbolic images, expressing the patron's knowledge, education or aesthetic tastes, and as active agents, designed to transport the host and his guests back into a particular imaginative setting. This fantasy role of the villa is not just escapism, however; it was also an integral part of the way that the villa presented its host and his power. Just as in the city Greek art-works were redisplayed to serve as emblems of Roman power, so too in the villa we can see evocations of the places and myths of Greek culture as a form of imaginative colonisation, showing Roman domination over the myth and history as well as the geography of contemporary Greece.¹⁹

In his excellent recent book on the *Tabulae Iliacae*, Michael Squire shows how these complex miniature objects, many of which come from villa contexts, offered a hermeneutic challenge to their erudite viewers.²⁰ In these panels a complex interaction between text and image drew on the literate education of viewers to prompt a range of responses and interpretations. At the opposite end of the visual scale, monumental pieces of art such as the sculptures from Sperlonga have similarly been read as an intellectual challenge, prompting viewers to put together their knowledge of Homer, Vergil or Ovid to construct a particular programme from the sculptures around them.²¹ Such studies have shown the complex intellectual games which art-works could play, and the ways that mythological retellings, in particular, drew both on a common general knowledge of myth and on a deeper understanding of different literary versions of common myths to pose challenges and offer opportunities for intellectual display.

¹⁹ The evocation of famous places from the Greek world is well attested from the Late Republic onwards, e.g. Cicero, *De Legibus* 2.2; Seneca, *Epistles* 55.6 (evocations of the Nile and Euripus); SHA, *Hadrian* 26.5–6 (on Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli, on which see also MacDonald and Pinto 1995: 3–7; Hales 2003: 83–93). Varro, *De re rustica* 2 preface 2, attests to the general fashion for calling parts of the villa by Greek names. See Bergmann 1999: 103–5 for a discussion of mythological landscape paintings linking them with Roman tourism; also Bergmann 2001.

²⁰ Squire 2011: esp. 70–4, refuting earlier characterisations of these pieces as designed for semi-literate clientele.

²¹ See Neudecker 1988: 41–3 noting that no one literary source explains all of the sculptures; for different readings stressing the importance of various different literary traditions see, e.g., Himmelmann 1995 (Homer's *Odyssey*, following L'Orange 1964); Andrae 1994 (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*); and Weis 2000 (Vergil's *Aeneid*). For summary see Squire 2009: 218–21.

Yet an equally important aspect of larger groups such as the Sperlonga sculptures, which are discussed further below, is their sheer visual effect, displayed set into an illusionistic landscape that encourages us to engage emotionally with the scenes before us.²² Here the effect of the sculptures goes further than Neudecker's model of appropriate décor would suggest.²³ When displayed in gardens, mythological subjects did not just convey the atmosphere of the garden as a place of nature and relaxation, they also turned the villa into a mythological realm, transporting their viewers into a different place, one filled with dangers and possibilities, which still held, however, the potential to say something about the host and his self-representation. This was a world that appealed directly to the emotions and urged the viewer to suspend their detachment, while at the same time also allowing them to show off their education and refinement through their interactions with these mythological images.

The Mythological Stage

Several anecdotes in our literary sources suggest that elite Romans deliberately sought to recreate a mythological world in their country villas. Sometimes mythological masques were staged for guests to enjoy as spectators, as in Hortensius' masque of Orpheus, whereas at other times owners and guests could themselves take part.²⁴ In both cases, the setting, decoration and staffing could all work together to create an appropriate stage for these ephemeral events. Hortensius' masque was set in a game park, with real animals playing the role of the beasts lured by Orpheus' music, while we hear later of the emperor Tiberius dressing up boys and girls as Pans and nymphs and standing them in front of grottoes in the woods at Capri to offer erotic delights, or the empress Messalina recreating a Bacchic revel with her lover, Gaius Silius.²⁵ While Suetonius presents Tiberius' actions as part of his decline into lust and perversion, the emperor was

²² On the effects of viewing the ensemble see Salza Prina Ricotti 1987: 138–69; Pertschi 1990; and Kuttner 2003: 117–21.

²³ Neudecker 1988: 31–54 outlines a variety of responses to divine and mythological images, but repeatedly stresses their use as scene-setting (39, 54), while also suggesting that groups depicting individual mythological narratives drew on their viewer's knowledge of myth (39–47). On the effect of landscape representations of myth see further Newby 2012, from which this account draws.

²⁴ On spectacle and theatricality at dinner parties see Jones 1991; D'Arms 1999.

²⁵ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 43; Tacitus, *Annals* 11.31.

not alone in delighting in the erotic beauty of young slaves, and we have plentiful evidence elsewhere of the use of beautiful slaves as attendants at banquets, in which they could be compared to specific mythological figures.²⁶ Just as human actors could be dressed in mythological guise to imbue the villa with an other-worldly atmosphere, statues too could be used to create the same effect. By populating the landscapes of the villa with statues of generic mythological figures, such as Pan, satyrs, maenads and various deities, villa owners could help to create the illusion of a mythological realm, as a stage against which their own mythological masques could be set. In other cases, specific mythological narratives were themselves recreated in sculptural form, reifying the sense of a divine, mythological realm through the re-enactment of a specific mythological narrative.

The mythological aura that was recreated through these means offered opportunities to entertain one's guests through a refined frisson of luxury and exoticism, but also to position the host as a man of power and status. Mythological masques can be seen as the adoption by Republican Romans of the political strategies adopted by Hellenistic kings, where court ceremonial served to link the king with specific divine figures, especially Dionysus, whose Triumph over the East offered a potent model for kings and generals from Alexander the Great to Antony.²⁷ Through surrounding oneself with mythological attendants, whether human or marble, the villa owner was elevated to the status of the gods themselves. This is made explicit later in eulogies of the emperor, as in Statius, *Silvae* 4.2, where Statius describes a dinner on the Palatine as an experience akin to dining with Jupiter, comparing the wine-waiters to Ganymede, Jupiter's own attendant.²⁸ Statues of Ganymede are certainly known from dining contexts in villas, such as those from Sperlonga and the Ninfeo Bergantino, discussed below.²⁹ Other non-provenanced statues of Ganymede might also have decorated villa sites, helping to recreate an atmosphere of sensuality and luxury, as is suggested by an epigram by Martial, which refers to a

²⁶ E.g. Lucian, *Saturnalia* 24 on slaves named Hyacinth, Achilles or Narcissus. See D'Arms 1991: 173; Bartman 2002: 261–71.

²⁷ Plutarch, *Alexander* 67, though Arrian, *Anabasis* 6.28, refutes the tradition; A. Stewart 1993: 359; Plutarch, *Antony* 24, 26. On Roman adoptions of Hellenistic spectacle culture see Kuttner 1999b. For a comparable exploration of the political uses of theatrical masque in Renaissance England see Orgel 1975.

²⁸ Statius, *Silvae* 4.2.10–11. On the Roman predilection for beautiful, foreign slaves see Bartman 2002: esp. 266.

²⁹ Pp. 99–100, 104–5.

river bank thronged by a 'chorus of Ganymedes' in the villa of Violentilla, wife of Arruntius Stella.³⁰

Displays of mythological statuary could range from generic representations of divine figures and their attendants, outside a specific narrative context, to groups re-enacting specific mythological narratives. The generic representations are by far the most common, and set up the villa as a place of luxury and escapism, taking the owner and his guests into a divine mythological sphere.³¹ This is especially true of the many representations of the followers of the god Dionysus, who rates alongside Apollo, Athena and Aphrodite as one of the most popular divine figures to appear in villa settings.³² While Apollo and Athena carried with them the cachet of intellectual culture, Aphrodite and Dionysus instead evoked the delights of the flesh, encouraging the illusion of an entrance into a world of intoxication and eroticism, especially when displayed in garden settings, as was the case in a number of examples.³³

Sometimes we cannot tell whether a particular statue acted as a generic figure or as a player in a specific mythological narrative, and indeed both possibilities may have remained open to ancient viewers too. The famous Barberini Faun in Munich has usually been taken as a generic figure representing a drunken follower of the god Dionysus (fig. 2.1). However, in a reassessment of the statue Jean Sorabella suggested that it might instead represent a particular mythological individual, the satyr captured by the king Midas as he lay asleep.³⁴ She draws attention to the rocky support of the statue, and the fact that it was at some point used as a fountain figure, to suggest that it may have been displayed in association with a pool or fountain, in a recreation of the original myth. While Sorabella suggests that the statue was originally commissioned by a Hellenistic king, setting up the patron as the equivalent of the cunning King Midas, its theme, rocky seat and function as a fountain also suggest a landscape setting in the Roman period.³⁵ Indeed, its findspot in the area around the modern Castel S. Angelo may suggest that it originally decorated elite gardens in this area. Here, too, it could have been understood as either a generic or a

³⁰ Martial 7.50; see also 7.15. Violentilla is here referred to as Ianthis. See Vioque 2002: 129; also Neudecker 1988: 46–7 on the ambiguities in the poem, which also refers to Hylas. On Stella, see White 1975: 267–72.

³¹ Neudecker 1988: 31–9, 47–54.

³² Neudecker 1988: 31 gives the figures for the imperial period as Apollo 21, Aphrodite 19, Dionysus 17 and Athena 16. See 47–54 on other Dionysiac figures.

³³ Zanker 1998. ³⁴ Sorabella 2007.

³⁵ Sorabella 2007: esp. 221 on discovery and 237 on the cuttings for pipes.

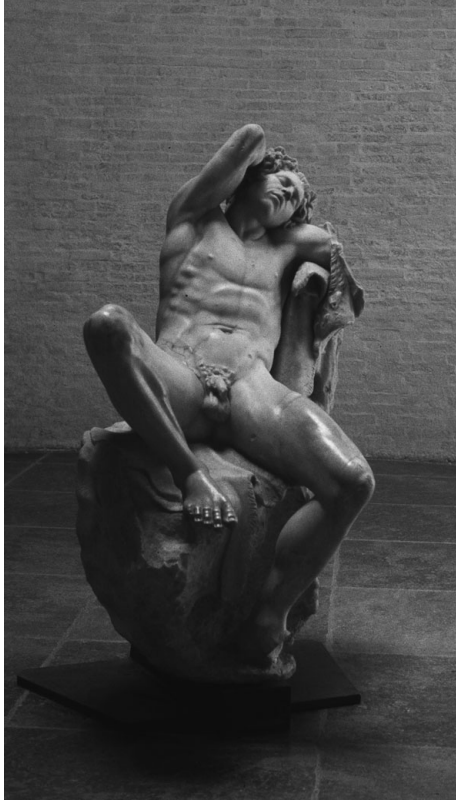


Figure 2.1 Barberini Faun Statue; Munich, Glyptothek.

specific mythological figure, and the patron accordingly linked with either the god Dionysus or with Midas and his Hellenistic emulator.

Another statue that seems to evoke a specific mythological event, but might also be taken as part of a general display of the world of Dionysus, is the figure of Marsyas that was found in the villa of the emperor Domitian at Castel Gandolfo (fig. 2.2).³⁶ The villa lay on the slopes between the crest looking over the Alban Lake and the Via Appia to the southwest. While the site has undergone a number of changes over the centuries, the original villa seems to have been laid out on a series of terraces with the bulk of the palace lying on the second terrace, with a theatre to the northwestern end. Beneath this terrace, to the south, old plans show the remains of a

³⁶ The ownership of the villa is clear from literary references: Juvenal, *Satire* 4.60–154; Suetonius, *Domitian* 4; Statius, *Silvae* 5.2.168–70; Martial, *Epigrams* 5.1.1–2. For accounts of the villa see especially Lugli 1917, 1918, 1919a and 1920; Neudecker 1988: 139–44 gives further bibliography.



Figure 2.2 Torso of a satyr, from Castel Gandolfo. Musei Vaticani inv. 9975.

hippodrome garden while the rest of the area was probably occupied by parkland. A dining grotto on the shores of Lake Albano also belonged to the villa and was decorated with sculptures showing Polyphemus and Scylla, discussed further below.

A number of Dionysiac statues come from the villa.³⁷ Four statues of the pouring Satyr type decorated the theatre. Their presence there was justified by their status as followers of the god of the theatre, while the replication of four statues of the same type also suggests that they invited aesthetic appreciation, prompting viewers to compare and contrast them.³⁸ Elsewhere, however, Dionysiac images seem to have decorated

³⁷ For a list of finds see Neudecker 1988: 139–44. Newby 2005: 96–106 discusses the athletic statues. Those held in the Antiquarium of the villa are catalogued and illustrated in Liverani 1989.

³⁸ See Koortbojian 2002: 195–6 with bibliography. More generally on replication in sculptural display see Bartman 1988.

garden spaces, including two statues found in the 1930s on the terrace below the main villa building and identified as Marsyas and Ariadne. The male torso is generally recognised as a replica of the statue of Marsyas which formed part of a group of Athena and Marsyas dedicated on the Athenian Acropolis and attributed to the Athenian sculptor Myron (fig. 2.2).³⁹ The group was well known in the imperial period, in which it appears on the coinage of Athens.⁴⁰ It is unclear, however, whether the statue from Castel Gandolfo formed part of a similar group. There is no evidence that this or any other of the Roman statues that survive were displayed alongside the goddess Athena. Indeed, a better preserved example of the Marsyas statue, found on the Esquiline hill in Rome, was found in a workshop that also yielded statues of satyrs, nymphs and the god Dionysus.⁴¹ While that statue's ears and tail identify him as a satyr, nothing integral to the statue requires the identification as Marsyas. In particular, there is no sign of the flute that Marsyas picked up after Athena had discarded it, though his gesture of surprise could allude to his discovery of it. Here, too, while it remains possible that some viewers might have seen a resemblance to a famous art-work or depiction of a specific narrative, others might simply have seen this image as a satyr, standing back in surprise at some element of the Dionysiac thiasos.

Indeed, this reading is more convincing when we consider the other statues that were found in the villa. A female figure was found close to the Marsyas figure, apparently in the area south of the great palace between the piscine and hippodrome with the head some distance away.⁴² The statue follows the type known as the 'Aphrodite' or 'Ariadne Valentini', which is attested in seven replicas, many of which have been heavily restored.⁴³ The presence on the head from Castel Gandolfo of the remains of an ivy-leaf crown supports the identification here as a Bacchic figure.⁴⁴ The figure was restored as a dancer, holding cymbals, but may originally have held a thyrsus in her raised left hand. While her monumentality might suggest the representation of a particular figure, Ariadne, her attributes are those of any Bacchic female. Whether identified as Marsyas and Ariadne, or simply satyr and bacchant, these two figures complement the presence of other Dionysiac figures in the villa.

³⁹ Musei Vaticani inv. 9975; on the discovery see Castelli 1933: 578. On the Greek group see Pliny, *Natural History* 34.57; Pausanias 1.24.1; Daltrop 1980.

⁴⁰ Daltrop 1980: 4–5, figs. 1–2.

⁴¹ Musei Vaticani inv. 9974; see Daltrop 1980: esp. 14–15 n. 32 for a list of finds.

⁴² Castelli 1933; Nogara 1935: 34. ⁴³ See Bielefeld 1978 on the type.

⁴⁴ Bielefeld 1978: 57–69, cat. 7.



Figure 2.3 Statue of Dionysus, Castel Gandolfo, Antiquarium inv. 36417.

Other Dionysiac figures now preserved in the villa's Antiquarium may also have come from the gardens of the ancient villa. These include a torso of Dionysus, from a group of Dionysus leaning on a satyr (fig. 2.3), and a torso of a seated satyr, which were both found stored in the cryptoporticus of the villa in the 1940s.⁴⁵ Liverani suggests that they might have come from excavations in the 1930s, in particular from a cache of statues found in the foundations of a farm manager's house built by Taddeo Barberini.⁴⁶

While we cannot be certain of the original display of these pieces, a location somewhere in the gardens of the villa seems most likely.⁴⁷ Where known, the findspots cluster around the area of the hippodrome, and it is possible the statues were displayed inside this, either in an architectural

⁴⁵ Castel Gandolfo Antiquarium inv. 36417, 36415; Liverani 1989: nos. 33, 34.

⁴⁶ Liverani 1989: 91.

⁴⁷ See, however, Nogara 1935: 34–8 for the suggestion of a display on the façade of the villa.

framework or set into natural vegetation, as at Oplontis.⁴⁸ Hippodrome or stadium-shaped gardens were a popular feature of villa design from the late first century onwards, featuring in Domitian's palace on the Palatine, as well as in Pliny's Tuscan villa and the second-century villas of Hadrian at Tivoli and the Quintilii on the Via Appia.⁴⁹ Pliny's description shows his to be a heavily landscaped space, incorporating plane trees, topiary and roses, as well as an imitation of rustic countryside, and a stibadium set around a pool for outdoor dining.⁵⁰ The tone is that of the abundance of the countryside, and a delight in its scenes and sounds. Pliny does not mention any sculptural decoration, but the presence in a similar space at Domitian's villa of the figures of a maenad and satyr would have helped to invest the natural landscape with divine potential, enhancing the aura of the space as a place for theatricality and escapism. The dating of the display is unclear. The statues have usually been dated to the second century AD, suggesting a display under one of the second-century emperors who are known to have used Domitian's villa after his death, but the dating of copies is notoriously difficult, and it is not impossible that the display was part of the original conception of the villa by Domitian and his architects.

Statues of the gods and their followers helped to set up the villa as a sacred space. It is important here not to make too hard and fast a division between religious and secular appreciations of these images. In her analysis of the neo-Attic Dancing Maenad reliefs, many of which were found in domestic contexts, Lori-Ann Touchette argues for a continued religious meaning for the reliefs, against the idea that they were merely decorative.⁵¹ She notes the presence of temples and shrines in villas and gardens, and the evidence that these could receive religious offerings.⁵² The same object could be both decorative and votive, with no clear division made between the two functions. This is relevant too for our understanding of the display of statues of the gods in gardens. They asserted the sacred nature of the space, setting up the gods as its inhabitants and protectors, and in some cases acting as the recipients of cultic attentions. Yet at the same time they helped to create the desired image of the villa, as an elevated, other-worldly space, in which the host and his guests could enjoy direct

⁴⁸ Castelli 1933 places the discoveries either side of the wall of the hippodrome.

⁴⁹ Claridge 2010: 153–5. Hadrian's villa: Hoffmann 1980.

⁵⁰ Pliny, *Letters* 5.6.32–40; for discussion see Spencer 2010: 130–4.

⁵¹ Touchette 1995: 31–56.

⁵² Touchette 1995: 33–6. On the religious associations of gardens see further Jashemski 1979: 115–40 and Grimal 1984: 41–56.

access to the figures and events of myth. Statues such as those of the Barberini Faun or the Marsyas might have been read as alluding to particular mythological narratives, or just as evocations of a more general Dionysiac aura, enhancing the viewer's experience of the villa and complementing their own activities within these spaces.

Realising Myth in the Roman Villa

In other cases, however, particular mythological narratives were clearly realised in sculptural form. The best attested represent the deaths of the Niobids, the flaying of Marsyas, and episodes associated with Odysseus, particularly the sea-monster Scylla and the blinding of Polyphemus.⁵³ All of these are attested in sculptural groups from villas and many seem to have been displayed in naturalistic settings within the landscape. We also find sculptures showing the deeds of Heracles and erotic scenes such as Leda and the swan or Ganymede and the eagle, some of which have definite findspots from villas, although others probably decorated baths or public spaces. While some mythological statues were perhaps displayed in porticoes, the evidence supports a tendency for landscaped settings. These enhanced the naturalistic effect of the sculptures, dissolving the boundaries between reality and representation and helping to encourage the viewer's immersion into a mythological realm.

The Adventures of Odysseus: Myths on Display in Sperlonga and Castel Gandolfo

The best attested example of the display of mythological sculptures in a landscape setting is provided by the grotto at Sperlonga, which probably dates back to the late first century BC.⁵⁴ The discovery here of sculptural pieces *in situ*, albeit fragmentary and in the basin of the cave, has allowed reconstruction of the original display (fig. 2.4). The sea-monster Scylla

⁵³ For discussion of narrative in sculptural groups see Brilliant 1986.

⁵⁴ Despite ongoing debate most scholars agree with the reconstructions proposed in Conticello and Andrae 1974; though see Hafner 1997 on the Polyphemus group. For reviews of the vast bibliography see Ridgway 2000; Weis 2000; and Squire 2007: 108–14. Dating of the display is still contested. I favour the Augustan date suggested by the epigraphic evidence (Rice 1986: 233–50) and supported by Kunze 1996: 175–83. This early date is accepted by R. R. R. Smith 1991: 352–3 and Pollitt 2000: 100 but rejected by Weis 2000: 137–9, who favours a Tiberian date. I also interpret the sculptures as new creations in the Hellenistic style made for this Roman setting, rather than as copies of earlier works.

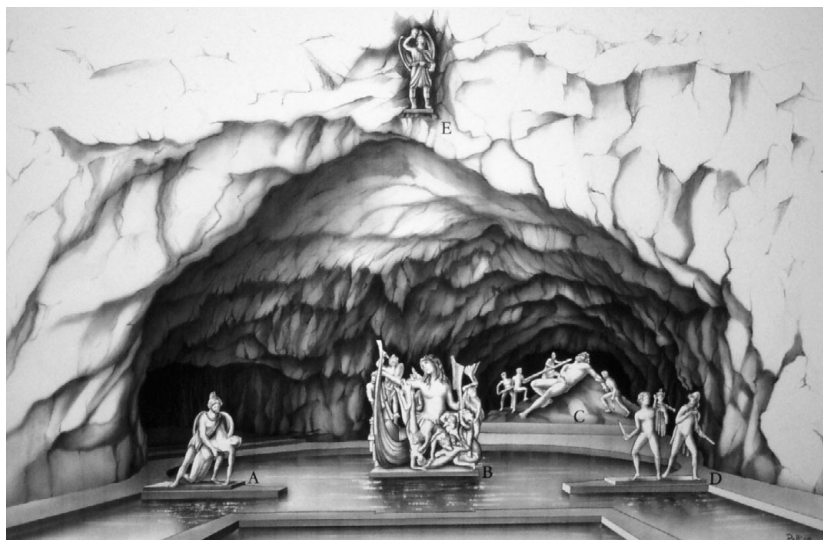


Figure 2.4 Reconstruction of the sculptural decoration of the cave at Sperlonga.
A: Pasquino group, B: Scylla, C: Blinding of Polyphemus, D: Theft of the Palladium,
E: Ganymede.

(B) was perched in the middle of the water, seizing hold of Odysseus' ship as it sailed past, while the Cyclops Polyphemus lay drunkenly in an inner cave with Odysseus and his men approaching to attack him (C). Two other groups stood in the foreground, showing Odysseus and Diomedes stealing the Trojan Palladium (D) and a warrior rescuing the body of a fallen comrade (A).⁵⁵ The programme of the sculptures has been the subject of great debate, with scholars relating it variously to Homer's *Odyssey*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or Vergil's *Aeneid*.⁵⁶ Rather than identifying a single message for the sculptures, however, diners probably used them as a springboard for displays of erudition, relating the images to different texts and traditions. In a manner parallel to the erudite challenge posed by the miniature *Tabulae Iliacae*, which seem to arise around the same time and were also occupied with epic themes, these colossal statues posed an interpretative challenge, inviting viewers to put together a mythological narrative or draw out specific messages from the display.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See Weis 2000: 117–24 for discussion of the identities of the two.

⁵⁶ For reviews of the scholarship see Squire 2007: 115–16; 2009: 202–21; and n. 21 above.

⁵⁷ A. Stewart 1977 gives an insightful discussion of the erudition that could have been provoked by the sculptures, linking them to Tiberius. On the dating and context of the *Tabulae Iliacae* see Squire 2011: esp. 27–86.

In addition to provoking interpretations which linked the statues to literary texts or comparisons of mythological traditions, Conticello has suggested that the four main groups could also be read as manifestations of the different sides of Odysseus' character, stressing his *pietas* (in the Pasquino type), *dolus* (theft of Palladium), *virtus* (Scylla) and *calliditas* (Polyphemus).⁵⁸ This reading of actions as manifestations of abstract qualities is certainly in line with Hölscher's reading of the exemplary character of Roman art, discussed in the [previous chapter](#). Yet it is less clear that these groups had the didactic quality possessed by the *exempla* displayed in public art. The *pietas* displayed in a hero's concern for his comrade's body (whether we identify him with Odysseus or another hero) or Odysseus' success over Polyphemus might indeed be read as positive role models, but the theft of the Palladium and the hero's inability to save his companions from Scylla evoke a more ambiguous response. While Odysseus survives his encounter with Scylla, many of his men do not. Marianne Hopman argues that the *Odyssey's* retelling of this story specifically encodes it as a failure of Odysseus' *aristeia*, in contrast to his success over the Cyclops, and that this account of heroic failure continued to colour later narratives of heroes' encounters with the monster.⁵⁹ The theft of the Palladium, too, while a successful exploit, runs counter to the Vergilian account, which made Aeneas bring the statue to Italy. The abstract characteristics that the hero exemplifies here can thus serve as provoking discussion about the right way to be a hero and what heroism entails. Although some have seen political messages in the group, such as an allusion to Octavian's defeat of Sextus Pompey, the ensemble seems to provoke a more multifaceted approach, prompting a range of discussions rather than referring to a single idea.⁶⁰

Yet the erudite responses the sculptures invited also go hand in hand with an imaginative pull.⁶¹ The landscape setting blurs the boundaries between art and nature, inviting guests to suspend their distance and enter into the world of myth that the sculptures created. In the *Odyssey* Polyphemus' cave is located 'on the land's edge, close by the sea', while different traditions located this as either on Sicily or at Cumae, on the

⁵⁸ Conticello and Andrae 1974: 36 n. 52; also A. Stewart 1977: 78.

⁵⁹ Hopman 2012: 23–51.

⁶⁰ See R. R. R. Smith 1991: 354 for the link with victories over Sextus Pompey, suggesting that the villa may have been owned by Agrippa.

⁶¹ Compare the dual responses of erudition and absorption as expressed in Philostratus, *Imagines*, discussed in Newby 2009 and below, [Chapter 3](#).

Campanian coast.⁶² The grotto at Sperlonga fits both; the cave complex is positioned along the coast, visible to those sailing along it, while within the cave the pool with its statue of Scylla becomes the strait between Sicily and the mainland and the inner recess the cave of Polyphemus.⁶³ Visitors to this grotto experienced a new dimension of familiar geography, in which the local landscape was reinvested with the events of the mythological past.⁶⁴

The architecture of the cave invited viewers to interact with its illusionism. The dining couches were placed on a separate island in front of the main pool, requiring diners to cross over the body of water dividing it from the rest of the villa. While diners may have accessed their couches via removable bridges, they could also have crossed by boat.⁶⁵ They might have taken a detour into the inner pool to examine the sculptural display at close range. In doing so they would be crossing the same body of water which was fraught with such dangers for Odysseus' companions, plucked off their ship by the murderous Scylla, suggesting a vicarious thrill of danger for the guests themselves. Effects of lighting and weather could have enhanced the illusion. If banqueting at night the lamplight flickering on the water or the reflections of the sculptures in the water, animated by a light breeze, would have helped to give movement to the scene, enhancing the illusion of reality.⁶⁶

The landscape elements here work in a number of ways. By providing the backdrop to the events illustrated – the sea from which Scylla emerges to seize her prey, or the cavernous lair of the Cyclops – they enhance the naturalism of the sculptures, encouraging viewers to mistake them for real monsters rather than simply their representation in art. Yet as a natural element, able to move and change, the water by reflecting the images also invests them with life and movement, further enhancing their realism. Nature itself also presented dangers, both in myth and in reality. The power of the sea to bring humans to heel was well known. While Scylla represented one danger Odysseus had overcome, storms and shipwrecks were another. The power and noise of the real sea, just

⁶² Homer, *Odyssey* 9.182–3; Kuttner 2003: 117.

⁶³ By the Roman period Scylla seems securely located in the straits of Messina; see Hopman 2012: 227. The placement of Scylla in the sea rather than a high cave (as *Odyssey* 12.94) in the visual representations reinforces her link as a marine threat.

⁶⁴ On the topographical resonances of the display see de Grummond 2000: 268–73.

⁶⁵ Kuttner 2003: 117–21; she suggests guests may also have swum in the pool; see also Salza Prina Ricotti 1987: 138–69.

⁶⁶ On lighting see Pertschi 1990; also Salza Prina Ricotti 1987: 169 on the effect of sunset.

behind the diners, would have acted as a permanent reminder of this power, investing Scylla's pool in the cave with some of this dangerous potential.⁶⁷

The ability of nature to wreak havoc was also most vividly illustrated in a real episode that took place here, the collapse of the cave during a dinner attended by Tiberius at which the emperor himself narrowly avoided death.⁶⁸ Diners visiting the cave after this event might have looked differently at its architecture with the sobering knowledge that it was not just the sculpted monsters that could pose a threat. This blurring of art and nature, the artifice of the sculpture and the reality of its surroundings, all helped to encourage an imaginative entering of the world represented, in which diners could take on the role of Odysseus themselves, and vicariously enjoy the thrill of some of the dangers he had experienced.

The key role which the landscape elements play in these groups was certainly recognised by a later viewer, as attested by an inscription set up in the cave, possibly as late as the fourth century AD. This is the so-called Faustinus inscription carved onto a panel which was apparently placed between the two inner recesses.⁶⁹ Despite the range of other sculptures which we know were added to the cave, the inscription concentrates (like us) on the two most imposing groups, Scylla and Polyphemus. It pictures Vergil standing in wonder, *miratus*, as he gazes, admitting himself defeated by the art of the cave. In its summary of the themes shown here the epigram extols both artistic and natural wonders, citing *speluncas vivosque lacus, Cyclopea saxa*, 'grottoes and living waters, Cyclopean rocks' alongside the 'blinded eye of the semi-beast' (Polyphemus) and the 'savagery of Scylla'.⁷⁰ For this viewer the natural features of the landscape were just as central to the overall effect of the cave as the sculpted works themselves, and the illusions created by both art and nature were equally applauded.⁷¹ At the same time the epigram also draws attention to the dialogue and competition here between art and literature, through the choice of Vergil as its ideal viewer. While the epigram presents one particular Late Antique reading of the sculptures, distinguished by its Vergilian viewpoint, its

⁶⁷ On Scylla as embodying the destructive power of the sea see Hopman 2012: 52–70.

⁶⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.59; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 39. Note, however, that Hafner 1996 rejects the association, followed by Häuber 2014: 620.

⁶⁹ *AE* 1967, no. 85. For analysis of the poem with discussion of date and authorship see Squire 2007; 2009: 202–38.

⁷⁰ Lines 4–6.

⁷¹ The final lines of the poem are fragmentary but seem to celebrate the artifice of the artist's hand alongside the skill of Nature herself; see Squire 2007: 104–5.

appreciation of the combined effect of art, landscape and literary tradition may also have been shared by earlier viewers.⁷²

Reconstructions of the encounter between Polyphemus and Odysseus are also attested elsewhere, in terracotta groups from two other Late Republican villas, as well as in a half life-size marble group of Polyphemus and Odysseus which may have originally decorated a grotto on the lower slopes of the Palatine in the Antonine period.⁷³ These suggest that the desire to recreate a famous episode from the *Odyssey* in material form began in the mid-first century BC and continued into the imperial period.

Such reconstructions can be compared with the painted views out onto a series of Odyssean landscapes which we find in the celebrated 'Odyssey landscape' paintings found on the Esquiline hill in Rome and now housed in the Vatican. Dated to the mid-first century BC, these paintings decorated the upper section of the wall in a closed room in what was probably an elite town house.⁷⁴ Between the pillars which divide the scenes they provided glimpses out onto the mythological world of Odysseus' adventures, including his encounters with the savage Laestrygonians, his meeting with the sorcerer Circe and his journey to the Underworld. The paintings take the house from its actual location in an affluent part of Rome and relocate it in the midst of an imaginative Homeric landscape. Landscape dominates in these paintings, with the figures themselves reduced to small, sketchy forms. Greek inscriptions label the figures, and invite us to make the connection to Homer's *Odyssey*. The paintings offer a combined invitation to both escapism and intellectual display, drawing upon the host and guests' shared knowledge of Greek literature while also offering the illusion that this Homeric landscape lay just beyond the walls of the house.⁷⁵

A similar illusion can be seen in the mythological landscape paintings which become popular in Campanian Third-Style painting from the late first century BC, offering vistas out onto sacred landscapes populated by the figures and events of myth.⁷⁶ The effect of the Sperlonga sculptures, however, was enhanced both by the landscape setting and by the sheer size of the sculptures. As the Faustinus epigram suggests, these leave the

⁷² See Squire 2009: 221–38 on the epigram's Vergilian texture.

⁷³ Alvino 1996; di Mino 1996; and Parisi Presicce 1996. On the Notitia's reference to a cave of the Cyclops in Rome see Palombi 1993.

⁷⁴ Ling 1991: 108–11 with figs. 108–11 gives a good overview. Biering 1995: 181–90 suggested a late first-century BC date for the frescoes but the traditional date of c. 50 BC has been reasserted by Coarelli 1998. O'Sullivan 2007: 50–2 discusses the findspot.

⁷⁵ See O'Sullivan 2007 on how the portico frame positions the viewer as an erudite, philosophical figure.

⁷⁶ Dawson 1944; Peters 1963; Bergmann 1999; Newby 2012: 373–80.

viewer stunned, *miratus*, at the visual impact of the ensemble, which is imbued with a sense of savagery and violence, as the references to Scylla's savagery and the broken prow make clear.⁷⁷ A similar emotional power for mythological images is also suggested by an epigram of Martial, in which the poet addresses the figures of Polyphemus and Scylla which belong to his friend Severus:

Tantus es et talis nostri, Polypheme, Severi
ut te mirari possit et ipse Cyclops,
sed nec Scylla minor, quod si fera monstra duorum
iunxeris, alterius fiet uterque timor.

So great and such a figure are you, Polyphemus of our Severus,
that the Cyclops himself could wonder at you. But no less is Scylla.
For if you had joined the fierce monsters of the two
both would cause the other fear.⁷⁸

While some scholars have identified Polyphemus and Scylla here as slave names, Neudecker's interpretation of them as statues is more convincing.⁷⁹ The size and quality of the Polyphemus image are said to invoke wonder, *mirari*, as well as fear, *timor*. At Sperlonga, the viewer could enjoy the vicarious thrill of sharing in Odysseus' adventures, before standing back from the images to discuss their literary underpinnings or the aspects of Odysseus' character they exemplified. In this way, myth offered a range of possibilities for self-display and escapism, allowing viewers to put themselves into the place of Odysseus and imaginatively share in the dangers he had confronted, while also enjoying the theatrical tableau staged before them and its literary allusions.

Other statues found in the area were added at various times, also embedded into the landscape and continuing the fantasy landscape created by the initial groups. A statue of Ganymede seized by the eagle was found in the basin in front of the cave where it seems to have fallen from a display above the entrance (E on [fig. 2.4](#)).⁸⁰ A statue of a female figure found to the

⁷⁷ AE 1967: no. 85, line 6: *saevitiam Scyllae frac[tamq(ue) in g]u[rg]ite pupp[im]*. On astonishment as an effect of visual art and of ecphrasis see Goldhill 2007: 4–5, 19; also Newby 2002b: 28–9 on *thauma* in Lucian.

⁷⁸ Martial, *Epigrams* 7.38.

⁷⁹ Neudecker 1988: 45. Vioque 2002: 255–7 discusses only the interpretation of them as the names of slaves, but this is not explicit in the Latin. I am grateful to Kathleen Coleman for discussing this epigram with me.

⁸⁰ Andrae 1994: 113–18, pls. 18–25 argues plausibly for this display, contra Neudecker 1988: 223. A range of dates has been suggested for the statue, some contemporary with the main display.



Figure 2.5 Statue of Andromeda from Sperlonga.

right side of the cave has holes in the back, suggesting a display attached to the rock (fig. 2.5). It represents the figure of Andromeda (or perhaps Hesione) exposed to the sea-monster, a scene which was also popular in mythological landscape paintings.⁸¹ The left edge of the cave was carved into the form of a ship and labelled in mosaic as *navis Argo*.⁸² Sailors and visitors gliding past this stretch of rocky coastline would have been able to see Andromeda chained to the rock, Ganymede ascending to heaven and the ship of the Argonauts in a blurring of real and mythological landscapes that continued within the cave.

The success of the ensemble at Sperlonga can be read in the fact that it prompted a number of imitations. In particular, the combination of Scylla and Polyphemus reappears in a number of other imperial villa contexts

⁸¹ Riemann 1980: 380. Neudecker 1988: 222, no. 62.27. On the paintings see Philips 1968.

⁸² Lavagne 1988: 547; Andrae 1994: 25–8.

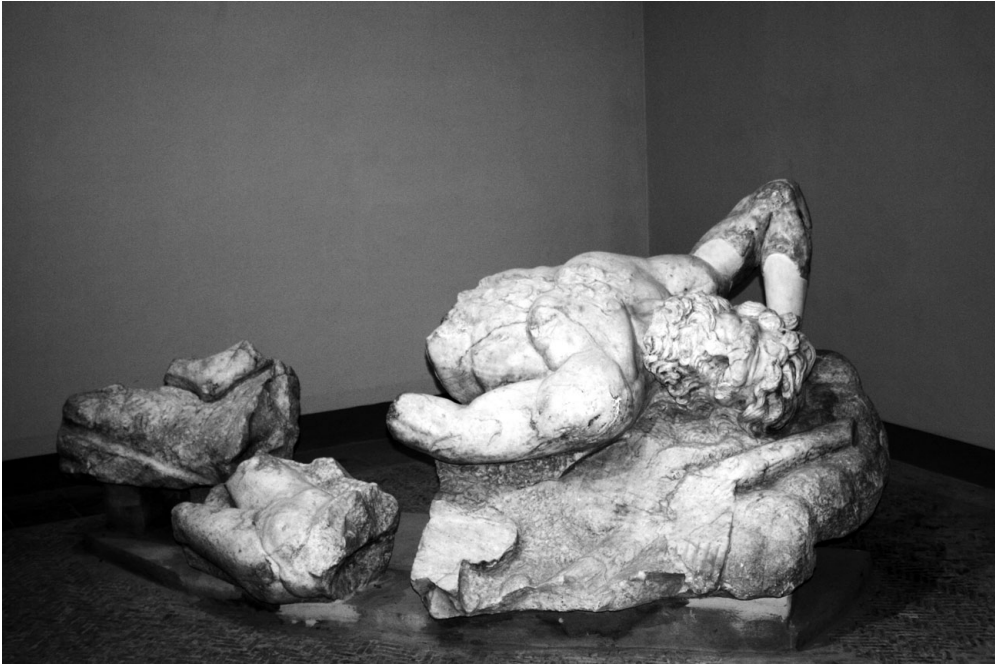


Figure 2.6 Statue of the sleeping Polyphemus, Castel Gandolfo Antiquarium inv. 36410.

associated with the emperors Claudius, Nero, Domitian and Hadrian.⁸³ These later groups did not copy the precise forms of the Sperlonga groups, but rather the idea of the cave as the haunt of the Cyclops and of Scylla as a marine threat. In the lakeside grotto of Domitian's villa at Castel Gandolfo, the Ninfeo Bergantino, a statue of Scylla was set into the centre of the basin, as at Sperlonga, though here evidence of Odysseus' ship is missing and the monster was perhaps shown alone, or clutching the corpses of some of Odysseus' men.⁸⁴

Polyphemus was also shown here, though at a different stage of the myth to that shown in the Sperlonga sculpture (fig. 2.6). Here he is shown asleep, the body of one of Odysseus' companions strewn beside him. Next to the Cyclops lie his syrinx and pedum while a ram from his flock was also present in the cave.⁸⁵ These details do not just signify Polyphemus' nature as a shepherd or (in the presence of the ram) remind us of the means by which Odysseus was to make his escape, they also add a different tone to

⁸³ Viscogliosi 1996a; Liverani 1996; Carey 2002.

⁸⁴ Liverani 1989: 83–5, no. 29; 1996: 339–41.

⁸⁵ Liverani 1989: 71–80, nos. 27–8; 1996: 334–9.

the depiction. Alongside his brutality we remember the gentler side of the Cyclops' nature, his care for his sheep and his musical skill, perhaps even, as in Theocritus' *Idyll* 11, his courtship of the nymph Galatea.⁸⁶

In his analysis of representations of Polyphemus, Michael Squire has suggested that texts and images consciously play themselves off against both the visual and literary traditions, with frequent allusions to other episodes in the Cyclops' life.⁸⁷ Thus paintings showing Polyphemus' courtship of Galatea sometimes allude to his later encounter with Odysseus. In a painting from the Villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscorecase the central scene of Polyphemus gazing at the nymph Galatea is complemented by a smaller representation of him hurling stones after Odysseus' departing ship.⁸⁸ A painting in the House of Amandus at Pompeii is an even closer parallel to the scene at Castel Gandolfo because only one chronological moment is represented (fig. 2.7).⁸⁹ Here Odysseus' ship is shown arriving in the top right corner of the scene, intruding on the central scene of pastoral courtship and presaging the violence which is to come.⁹⁰

Through the inclusion of the syrinx, pedum and ram in the sculptures of the Ninfeo Bergantino we see that Polyphemus is not just a monster, he is also a rustic shepherd and a musician, a figure of the wilderness whose meeting with the wily Odysseus brings violence and destruction to both. This depiction invites viewers to consider the different mythological traditions about the Cyclops, offering an opportunity for erudite display. It also enables viewers to use the sculptures before them as a prompt for wider-reaching discussions about different life-styles and, indeed, literary genres, in a manner which we will also see in relation to the wall-paintings discussed in Chapter 4. Indeed, it is useful here to draw a comparison with the Spada reliefs, a set of eight marble reliefs with mythological themes that were found in the Church of S. Agnese fuori le Mura at Rome and probably came from an elite suburban villa along this stretch of the Via Nomentana.⁹¹ These panels present separate scenes of mythological figures and prompt consideration of the different types of male hero: the archetypal hero alone with his horse or dogs, as in the figures

⁸⁶ The Odyssean and Theocritean versions of Polyphemus are played with in Ovid's version, *Metamorphoses* 13.750–897.

⁸⁷ Squire 2009: 300–56, esp. 322–9 on the paintings.

⁸⁸ Von Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1990: 28–37.

⁸⁹ Pompeii I. 7, 7, room b. Cf. Squire 2009: 325 n. 67 for two other similar paintings.

⁹⁰ See von Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1990: 38–9 on the contrast between the two paintings.

⁹¹ For discussions see Zanker 1966: 766–8; Kampen 1979; Brilliant 1984: 83–9; Newby 2002a. On the probable context see Neudecker 1988: 212–13.



Figure 2.7 Wall-painting of Polyphemus and Galatea, House of the Priest Amandus, Pompeii I. 7, 7.

of Bellerophon and Adonis (fig. 2.8), or the contrasting types of hero represented by the pairing of Diomedes and Odysseus, or the musical Amphion.⁹² In the Polyphemus statue from Castel Gandolfo, we see the

⁹² Newby 2002a: 137–8.



Figure 2.8. Relief showing the wounded Adonis; Rome, Palazzo Spada.

clash between two different sides of Polyphemus, as rustic shepherd or feral beast. When the pastoral Cyclops meets an epic hero, bucolic pursuits yield to violence, as exemplified by the juxtaposition of the corpse of Odysseus' companion and the abandoned syrinx.

Domitian's dining grotto did not just offer a frisson of violence or opportunity for erudite display, it also invited guests into a world of erotic delights. Amongst the sculptures found was one of a youth, partly clad in a cloak which is hitched up at the back to reveal one buttock.⁹³ He has sometimes been identified with a figure of Paris by the sculptor Euphranor. However, it is also possible that it may have evoked the figure of Ganymede, cup-bearer to the gods, who was also shown at Sperlonga, though there in the midst of his abduction by the eagle. As we have already seen, beautiful attendants played a key role in creating a sense of luxury and eroticism at a Roman banquet, and could often be compared to mythological figures.

⁹³ Liverani 1989: 86–8; 1996: 332; Newby 2005: 132–4, fig. 4.20.

Here too guests may have been invited to see themselves as surrounded by attendants from myth, elevating their own status to that of the Olympian gods.

The caves at Sperlonga and Castel Gandolfo can be reconstructed with a reasonable degree of accuracy, though other sculptures may have distracted the viewer's attention, or added to the range of interpretations available.⁹⁴ They show that mythological ensembles could make allusions to different literary and mythographic traditions, inviting erudite viewers to display their learning, but that at the same time they also invited viewers into a fantasy world in which they could enjoy the illusion of sharing vicariously in the dangers experienced by Odysseus. The illusionistic and dramatic pull of these sculptures is enhanced by their Hellenistic style, which invokes a sense of drama and excitement, rather than the calm containment of the classical style.⁹⁵ This allowed a Roman viewer to see himself as a second Odysseus, tying in with the theatricality of the villa realm, and putting even the monsters of the Greek imagination at the service of Roman self-display.

Elsewhere, other mythological narratives were recreated through sculptural groups, but with a rather different tone. In the next section I examine a series of groups which focus on the violent ends met by those who dared to confront the gods. While these groups too were placed in landscape settings that enhanced their naturalistic pull, the viewer is here led into a rather different world from that of the adventures of Odysseus. Rather than identifying the viewer with a Greek hero, who manages to escape the threats posed by monstrous beings, sculptures representing Marsyas, the Niobids and Laocoon posed more worrying questions about the susceptibility of the viewer to become victim to the power of the gods.

Punishing *hubris* I: The Niobids in the *Horti Lamiani*

A group of statues showing the deaths of the Niobids, now mostly in the Uffizi in Florence, was found together on the Esquiline hill in Rome in 1583, along with a group of two wrestlers and the statue of a Muse. Little is known about the findspot except for the fact that it was in a vineyard which seems to have lain in the area to the northeast of the intersection

⁹⁴ See Beard and Henderson 2001: 74–82 on Sperlonga, noting the many other sculptures found here.

⁹⁵ A. Stewart 2006; Cf. Hölscher 2004: 23–46 on the use of the Hellenistic style for battle depictions.

of the modern Via Merulana and Via Labicana/Viale Manzoni.⁹⁶ This area has usually been taken as part of the ancient *Horti Lamiani*, a set of elite gardens on the Esquiline which bordered the *Horti Maecenatis*, though Chrystina Häuber has suggested that the *Horti Maecenatis* also extended into this area.⁹⁷ *Horti* were vast areas of parkland around the outskirts of Rome where villas, pavilions and shrines were set into carefully constructed ‘natural’ landscapes. First set up by rich members of the Republican aristocracy, these gardens offered a world half-way between the town and the city, a place for *otium* (leisure), which could also be used for public entertaining and business.⁹⁸ Over the course of the first century AD, most gardens became imperial property; while they offered a space that was less obviously public than the imperial residences on the Palatine, they still served an important role as places to receive guests or embassies, and impress visitors with the luxury of imperial display.⁹⁹

The *Horti Lamiani* were probably initially laid out by L. Aelius Lamia, consul in AD 3, but soon seem to have entered into imperial ownership. By the time of the emperor Gaius we find the emperor receiving embassies there, and it may have been Gaius who was responsible for building new structures here.¹⁰⁰ The archaeological remains from the area are scanty but some idea of the layout can be gathered from what remains (fig. 2.9, pl. 1). Remnants of a portico, fronting rooms decorated with garden paintings, probably represent the front of the main palace, looking down over the valley marked by the Via Merulana (17 on fig. 2.9 and pl. 1). Behind this lay the richly decorated cryptoporticus (1 on fig. 2.9, 1–6 on pl. 1), which yielded the famous statues of Commodus as Hercules and the Esquiline Venus, amongst others, probably deliberately hidden to protect them at some point in the gardens’ history.¹⁰¹ On the lower level closer to the Via Merulana lies a curved structure marked on Rodolfo Lanciani’s maps as being composed of three semicircular concentric walls with the western side closed by a portico (14 on fig. 2.9).¹⁰² It has been identified either as a semi-circular nymphaeum or a circular *ambulatio* or walkway,

⁹⁶ Geominy 1984 gives a full account of the statues and their findspots. See also Diaciatì 2005: 206–14 and Newby 2012: 369–73.

⁹⁷ Cima 1986; Cima di Puolo 1996; Häuber 1990: 15, 30, 103; 1996; 2014; La Rocca 1998: 223.

⁹⁸ See Grimal 1984; Cima and La Rocca 1986; Purcell 1987, 1996; La Rocca and Cima 1998; Cima and Talamo 2008.

⁹⁹ Wallace-Hadrill 1998a; Beard 1998, especially on literary representations of the *horti*. On the excavation history and problems of reconstructing display see Talamo 1998: 138, 143–5 and Häuber 2014. The *horti* are not included in Neudecker 1988.

¹⁰⁰ Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 351, 358; for accounts of the gardens see Cima 1986; Cima di Puolo 1996; and Barbera et al. 2010 with further bibliography.

¹⁰¹ Lanciani 1897: 104–5. ¹⁰² Lanciani 1990: pls. 23, 24.

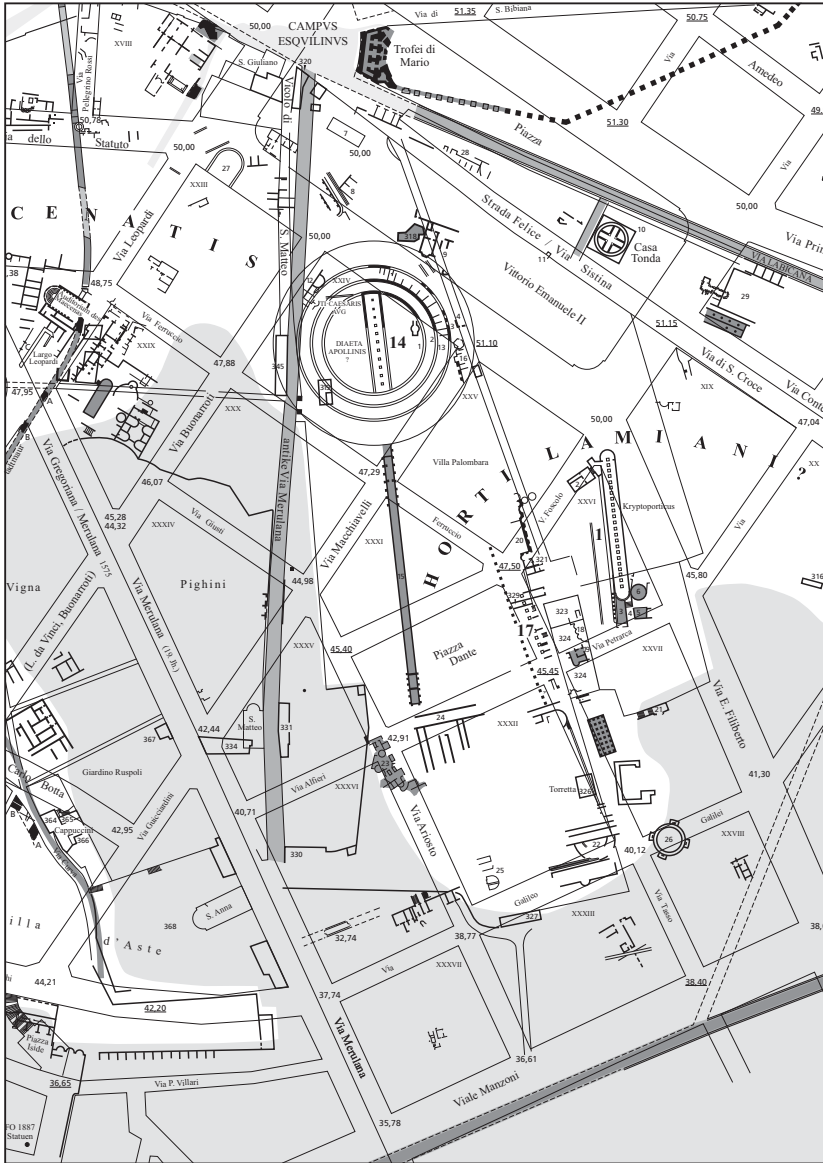


Figure 2.9 Plan of the *Horti Lamiani*.

possibly the *Diaeta Apollinis*, which is mentioned in an inscription.¹⁰³ While Chrystina Häuber omits the structure from her latest maps, on the grounds that it cannot now be located with certainty, she agrees that it

¹⁰³ Nymphaeum: Cima 1986: 48–50, 51–2 n. 71, 55–6; circular *ambulatio/museion*: Häuber 1990: 82–96 with earlier bibliography. The inscription is *CIL* VI.29774.



Figure 2.10 Niobe and daughter, Florence Uffizi inv. 294.

must have been located somewhere in this general area.¹⁰⁴ The Niobids were found a little further to the south, somewhere in the area south of the current Piazza Dante (Isola XXXII or XXXIII on pl. 1).¹⁰⁵

The statues all have rocky bases and are relatively shallow. It seems likely that they were designed for an open-air garden setting, either set into the natural landscape where they may have been backed by rocky niches or shrubberies, or displayed within the framework of a *nymphaeum*.¹⁰⁶ Other Niobid statues found in Hadrian's villa at Tivoli and at the Villa of the Quintilii on the Via Appia have also been associated with garden and *nymphaea* settings, especially in relation to stadium gardens.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Häuber 2014: 324–5.

¹⁰⁵ Stark 1863: 219; Geominy 1984: 30. Lanciani 1990: pl. 31 more precisely places it in the area of the current Piazza Dante but without further proof. See further Häuber 1991: 227–33.

¹⁰⁶ See Geominy 1984: 211–32 and 283–8 on display; Diaciatì 2005 argues for a display in a *nymphaeum*, both here and in other villas.

¹⁰⁷ On the statues from Hadrian's villa see Hoffmann 1980: 76; Raeder 1983: 170–1, no. III.85; Geominy 1990. Diaciatì 2005: 199–203 argues for a display in the *nymphaeum* at one end of the stadium garden. On the statue of Niobe and child found at the Villa dei Quintilii see Paris and Pettinau 2007.



Figure 2.11 Eldest son of Niobe, Florence Uffizi inv. 302.



Figure 2.12 Kneeling Niobid, Florence Uffizi inv. 289.

The group consists of eleven sculptures, representing twelve figures: Niobe with her youngest daughter (fig. 2.10), three other daughters, six sons (including figs. 2.11 and 2.12) and the figure of the paedagogus.¹⁰⁸ Thus it is almost a complete group of Niobe and her children, who are shown fleeing the arrows of the gods Apollo and Artemis. The reworking of the statues after their discovery makes it hard to date them, but they are usually seen as Roman copies of an earlier Greek group, and other duplicates exist elsewhere for some of the statues.

The nature of this earlier group is debated; while Geominy favoured a late fourth-century BC date for the original group and a possible attribution to Scopas of Paros, others have preferred a late Hellenistic date.¹⁰⁹ Pliny the Elder mentions a group of the ‘dying children of Niobe’ in the Temple of Apollo Sosianus in Rome, and says that it is uncertain whether it is the work of Scopas or Praxiteles. This group may be a candidate for

¹⁰⁸ See Geominy 1984 and Diacchiati 2005: 225–35 for a full list.

¹⁰⁹ Geominy 1984: 233–82; Hölscher 1985: 130–3; Diacchiati 2005: 197–9.

the original group, but Pliny's vagueness makes it hard to draw any firm conclusions.¹¹⁰

In any case, whether or not the group copies a famous earlier ensemble, the main focus of the group as it was displayed in the *Horti Lamiani* appears to be not its artistic heritage but its visual and emotional effect. The figures are animated by their twisting poses and upturned heads, frozen as they turn to run or are hit by divine arrows. The display of so many figures shown fleeing and dying would have demanded an engaged response, projecting the viewers of these statues into the perilous world of ancient myth. Whether the statues were displayed in the niches of a nymphaeum, or more widely scattered amongst plantings, their criss-crossing gazes and dynamic poses serve to implicate the viewer in the events represented here. As the Niobids look around for the source of the arrows that wound them, the ancient viewer too might have been prompted to seek out the agent of so much destruction. Thus far, figures of Apollo and Artemis have not been discovered and it seems likely that the group did not contain the figures of the gods themselves.¹¹¹

In temple contexts, displays of the Niobids served to assert the power of the god Apollo, as in the cases of the group mentioned by Pliny in the Temple of Apollo Sosianus, and the representation on the doors of the Palatine Temple of Apollo.¹¹² The myth acted as proof of the god's power, asserting his right to receive honour and warning against *hubris*. In the context of the gardens the presence of the god's victims also acts to illustrate his power. If the inscription naming a *Diaeta Apollinis* did originally come from the gardens, the god seems to have been celebrated in some form of pavilion here. The statues continue this identification of the gardens as a place of Apolline power, through their vivid visualisation of his destructive potential.

Punishing *hubris* II: Public and Private Readings of Marsyas and Laocoon

Another violent ensemble which shows the power of the god to punish those who stand against him is the hanging Marsyas group, already discussed in the [previous chapter](#).¹¹³ A number of versions of the hanging

¹¹⁰ Pliny, *Natural History* 36.28; Geominy 1984: 249–72.

¹¹¹ Diacchiati 2005: 198–9. See A. Stewart 2004: 147–52 linking the absence of the victors in Roman groups showing defeated Gauls with the groups of Marsyas and the Niobids.

¹¹² Pliny, *Natural History* 36.28; Propertius 2.31.14. See discussion above, p. 52.

¹¹³ On the type see Meyer 1987; Weis 1992; Maderna-Lauter 1999.

Marsyas statue come from Rome and its surroundings, and a villa context seems certain for at least three of these. One, dated to the Augustan period, was found reasonably close to the Niobid groups discussed here, in the area of the *Horti Maecenatis*, close to the so-called Auditorium of Maecenas (fig. 1.14; the findspot is marked on pl. 1).¹¹⁴ A second comes from the area of the villa of Herodes Atticus along the Via Appia.¹¹⁵ Another statue in Karlsruhe comes from a villa at Marino where it was discovered in the portico of a large peristyle.¹¹⁶ Lanciani suggested that it probably formed the focal decoration of an apsidal room off the peristyle, but this garden peristyle seems to have been extensive and a landscape setting for the statue is also possible.¹¹⁷ While we have no definite proof of a landscape setting for the statues, the characteristics of the type, showing Marsyas tied to a tree trunk, would certainly suit a display within a garden setting, enhancing the naturalistic and theatrical effect of the statue. While small-scale replicas suggest that the type derives from a narrative group showing Apollo, Marsyas and the Scythian slave ordered to flay him, Apollo is notable by his absence from the large-scale replicas.¹¹⁸ While Apollo does not partake directly in the events shown, however, he does often appear to be seen on display elsewhere in these spaces. In the villa at Marino a statue of Apollo Citharoedus was found in an interior space, at some distance from the Marsyas.¹¹⁹ Similarly, in the Villa of the Quintilii, where a statue of Niobe and her daughter has been found, the avenging gods Apollo and Artemis were elsewhere included in the statuary display, but not as part of this particular narrative group.¹²⁰

In fact, as suggested above, it is significant that representations of the violent actions of the gods often do not seem to have directly featured the gods themselves. The gods could be present throughout villa settings, exercising their powers in a range of different ways, and represented in

¹¹⁴ Palazzo dei Conservatori inv. 1977. Weis 1992: no. 39 (Julio-Claudian); Häuber 1991: 168, 242–3, 261, cat. 131; 2014: 613–14 (Augustan). See also above, pp. 76–8.

¹¹⁵ Museo Torlonia inv. 308; Weis 1992: no. 38. Neudecker 1988: 185–6, 189 n. 28 excludes it and others on the grounds of the difficulty of ascertaining findspots for the Torlonia finds.

¹¹⁶ Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum. Weis 1992: no. 19.

¹¹⁷ Lanciani 1884: 460; the findspot is indicated on pl. 15–16. On the so-called villa of Voconius Pollio see Neudecker 1988: 168–70, no. 25.6.

¹¹⁸ The head of a youth wearing a Phrygian cap was found at Marino and could have formed part of the Scythian figure: Weis 1992: 46. Figures of Apollo appear in relief depictions of the hanging Marsyas but have not been found in connection with statues of Marsyas; see Weis 1992: 89–90; A. Stewart 2004: 150 lists fifty-nine replicas of the Marsyas, against one figure of the Scythian.

¹¹⁹ Neudecker 1988: 169, no. 25.8.

¹²⁰ Neudecker 1988: 195, nos. 39.52–3. On the Niobe statue see Paris and Pettinau 2007. Roccas 2002 explores the meanings of Apollo Citharoedus in villa settings.

forms that could express all their various qualities. These statues identified the villa realm as one in which the gods were omnipresent. Scenes of their power, particularly in punishing transgressors, crystallised this divine aura, showing them also to be omnipotent.

How, then, did viewers respond to the image of pain and suffering presented in the hanging Marsyas group? As mentioned in the [previous chapter](#), Andrew Stewart has suggested that the two versions of this group, the ‘red’ and the ‘white’, elicit different responses, seeing the ‘red’ version as illustrating Marsyas’ crazed reaction to pain, while the ‘white’ exemplifies instead patience and stoicism.¹²¹ In a different reading, Luca Giuliani suggests that the posture of the ‘white’ Marsyas reveals his struggle to get away from the knife that will flay him, and sees this rather than the ‘red’ version as most exemplifying fear and pathos.¹²² While Stewart suggests that baroque renderings of violence could evoke the tragic response of pity and fear, Giuliani argues that ancient depictions of Marsyas did not elicit pity, since Marsyas was coded as different from the viewer, and fully deserved his fate.¹²³ Yet we have already seen in [Chapter 1](#) that the Roman Marsyas could stand as symbol for the Roman people; might a Roman viewer have sympathised with Marsyas’ fate?

This question of audience response is, as Giuliani’s article shows, of crucial importance for our understanding of these images of pain and suffering. The absence of victors and concentration on the defeated poses the question of whether the viewer identifies with the victor, symbolically taking on his role, or with the defeated.¹²⁴ Latin literary traditions of the myths of those attacked by the gods certainly suggest a range of possibilities. Thus while Ovid presents Minerva in the *Fasti* as citing Marsyas’ punishment with approval, in the *Metamorphoses* the sheer level of grisly detail suggests that Apollo’s reaction is excessive.¹²⁵ In his treatment of another myth dealing with *hubris*, that of Actaeon, who was turned into a stag and torn apart by his own hounds in punishment for his viewing of the naked Diana, Ovid explicitly removes Actaeon from blame, suggesting that he came upon the goddess by accident rather than design, and that his viewing of her was an error, rather than a crime. Later, he

¹²¹ A. Stewart 2006: 42–4, 54. ¹²² Giuliani 2006: 36 n. 4.

¹²³ Giuliani 2006: 38–9, 42–5. Giuliani is primarily discussing responses to the original group, which he suggests was displayed in a sanctuary of Apollo, rather than the Roman copies. Cf. Muth 2009 on responses to the Laocoon.

¹²⁴ A. Stewart 2004: 136–80 and Giuliani 2006: 39–41 both draw comparison with triumphalism over the defeated Gauls.

¹²⁵ Cf. Ovid, *Fasti* 6.706 with *Metamorphoses* 6.832–400. See [Chapter 1](#), above, n. 165.



Figure 2.13 Statue of Actaeon. London, British Museum Sc. 1568.

discusses the gods' diverse reactions to Actaeon's death; while some saw it as excessive, others could find justification.¹²⁶ Like the deaths of the Niobids and the flaying of Marsyas, Actaeon's transformation was also portrayed in sculpted and painted forms in domestic settings. A sculpture now in the British Museum from a villa at Lanuvium shows Actaeon mid-transformation as he is being attacked by his hounds (fig. 2.13).¹²⁷ The myth was also popular in Campanian mythological landscape paintings.¹²⁸ Many of these show Actaeon looking down towards the goddess with his hand raised to his head in an ambiguous gesture, which could be read either as spying, or as a gesture of surprise (fig. 2.14).¹²⁹ Both literary

¹²⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.141–2, 253–5. Ovid presents the death as a result of Actaeon's fatal wandering into a sacred realm: see Newby 2012: 356–7 and further references at n. 172 below.

¹²⁷ British Museum Sc. 1568; A. H. Smith 1901; Neudecker 1988: 162–3. ¹²⁸ Leach 1981.

¹²⁹ See also the painting from the Casa del Marinaio, Pompeii VII, 15.2 (PPM 7: 740–1, fig. 74).



Figure 2.14 Wall-painting of Actaeon and Artemis, House of the Orchard, Pompeii I, 9.5.

and visual retellings of myth seem to leave the question open, allowing viewers to read the punishments of these victims as either just or excessive.

As we saw in the [previous chapter](#), the context in which these images were viewed may have helped to steer the interpretation in one way or another. When seen in the context of a god's sanctuary, scenes such as the deaths of the Niobids asserted the power of the god to punish *hubris*. In a landscape setting, however, the question of response is perhaps more complex. We can read the statues as part of the luxurious apparatus of the villa, offering guests the chance to enjoy the theatrical delights it offered and indulge in voyeuristic displays of violence that were similar to those on display in public

spectacles.¹³⁰ Yet the placement of statues in open landscapes, in the very space through which the viewer was travelling, also acts to implicate guests in the dangers posed by the gods who control this space, drawing them into an identification with the victims portrayed.¹³¹ This may have been particularly acute when violent myths were displayed in imperial spaces. Here the role of the gods could be adopted by the emperor himself, leading to the uncomfortable suggestion that his guests, like these mythological victims, might themselves be subject to the exercise of quasi-divine power.

The slippage between one's position as a detached viewer or potential victim is a *topos* of much imperial literature, especially that written about despotic emperors such as Nero or Domitian.¹³² Much of this is focussed on the theatre or arena, with the danger that spectators might themselves become the spectacle if they incurred the wrath of an irate emperor.¹³³ Anecdotes about the theatre also suggest the danger that re-enactments of myth might break the limits of the stage, spilling over into real life, as when actors playing Heracles or Ajax meted out real violence, or a dancer playing Icarus actually fell to his death at the feet of the emperor Nero.¹³⁴ These literary anecdotes suggest an interest in the fragility of the line between representation and reality, as well as an almost masochistic relish in the potential danger in which ordinary people might find themselves. They suggest that part of the frisson of attending the spectacles was the potential for this line to be crossed.

The blurring between reality and illusion, spectator and spectacle, was not confined to the world of public spectacle. Indeed, it was more intense in the private confines of the villa with its traditions of theatrical role-playing and spectacle. That this theatricality could become dangerously unsettling is suggested by Cassius Dio, who recounts a macabre dinner party staged by the emperor Domitian in which the guests were served a funeral banquet and waited upon by slaves in the guise of phantoms,

¹³⁰ See Barton 1993: 47–81 and Edwards 2007: 46–77 on the thematisation of death and violence in Roman culture. Coleman's 1990 study of 'fatal charades' is particularly relevant here. Cf. A. Stewart 2004: 160–70 on Roman responses to images of the defeated Gauls.

¹³¹ On the polar responses of objectification and identification, initially established in film studies, see Mulvey 1975 and Clover 1992 and the adoption of these theories in Fredrick 2002b, 13–16 and Benton 2002, esp. 31–3.

¹³² Bartsch 1994.

¹³³ E.g. Dio 59.10.3; Suetonius, *Claudius* 35; Suetonius, *Domitian* 10. Contra Pliny, *Panegyricus* 3. For discussion see Barton 1993: 62–5.

¹³⁴ Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 2.7.17; Lucian, *On the Dance* 83; Suetonius, *Nero* 12.2.

leading them to fear for their lives.¹³⁵ A similar blurring between reality and role-play was encouraged by these illusionistic displays of statues that invited the viewer into the violent world they recreated. Part of the effect of these groups was to allow guests a frisson of fear at what entering into the realm of the gods might entail, while also inviting them to enjoy the entertainment and erotic voyeurism on offer.¹³⁶ In an imperially owned space, however, the traditional alignment of the emperor with the gods means that these images of divine wrath could also be read as warnings to stay on the right side of the gods' representative on earth. In this case the public resonances of the myth intrude also into the private sphere, while the traditions of theatricality and escapism associated with villa life also continue to allow for other responses.

The Laocoon statue, found on the Esquiline hill in 1506, is an interesting case study around which to consider this variety of responses. Once discovered, the statue was immediately identified with the group which Pliny describes as being the work of the Rhodian craftsmen Hagesander, Polydorus and Athenodorus.¹³⁷ Almost everything about the statue now in the Vatican has been doubted, including its findspot, date and relationship to the statue mentioned by Pliny. While some argue that our Laocoon is not the same as Pliny's, noting that there is some fragmentary evidence for other versions of the subject on display in Rome, most accept the identification.¹³⁸

An anonymous letter from 1506 states that the statue was found in an ancient underground room, decorated with a beautiful pavement and marvellous wall-decoration.¹³⁹ Chrystina Häuber's research into the *Horti Maecenatis* suggests that it was found somewhere in the area around the main *domus* of the *Horti* (marked 55 on the left edge of pl. 1) rather than specifically in the Sette Sale (the cisterns of the Baths of Trajan).¹⁴⁰ She interprets Pliny's reference to the statue as being *in domo Titi imperatoris* as meaning that the statue was displayed in the house in which Titus was living at the time Pliny was writing. Titus had taken the title of *imperator*, 'victorious general' after his victory in Jerusalem, and Pliny's

¹³⁵ Dio 67.9.1–4; see Edwards 2007: 161–4. Compare Petronius, *Satyrice* 30–78 on the surprises awaiting guests at Trimalchio's dinner party.

¹³⁶ See further Newby 2012 on the role that landscape plays in this process.

¹³⁷ Pliny, *Natural History* 36.37. For a stimulating account of the statue and its history since its rediscovery see Brilliant 2000; for collected essays, see Gall and Wolkenhauer 2009.

¹³⁸ For doubts see especially Albertson 1993 and Koortbojian 2000.

¹³⁹ Quoted by Häuber 2014: 618 n. 66.

¹⁴⁰ Häuber and Schütz 2004: 115–36; A. Stewart 2006: 145 n. 56.

use of the title is therefore not inconsistent with the dedicatory date of his work, AD 77, before Titus become emperor. As Häuber suggests, it is quite possible that Titus was living in the *Horti* of Maecenas at this time, and that Pliny's Laocoon is therefore identical with the statue found in 1506.¹⁴¹ The sculptors' names given by Pliny appear again on the stern of Odysseus' ship in the Scylla group at Sperlonga, suggesting that the Laocoon statue was created around the same time. While past scholarship tended to see both these works as Roman copies of earlier Hellenistic originals, I along with others prefer to see them as Roman creations in the Hellenistic baroque style, dating probably from around 30–20 BC.¹⁴²

The sculpture shows the Trojan priest Laocoon and his sons being attacked by snakes (fig. 2.15). This episode is most famous to us through the description in Vergil's *Aeneid*, but seems to have existed in a number of variants in antiquity. According to the account of Troy's defeat which Aeneas gives to Dido in Book 2 of the *Aeneid*, Laocoon had warned the Trojans that the wooden horse might be a trap and had thrown a spear against its side. Later while he was sacrificing, twin snakes came out of the sea to destroy him, before slithering off to Athena's sanctuary. The episode was taken by the assembled Trojans as a sign that the goddess was angered by Laocoon's impiety, and the wooden horse was received into the city with disastrous effect.¹⁴³ Thus in the *Aeneid*, Laocoon's death is a trick by the gods to help bring about Troy's destruction. The work was composed in the 20s BC and published soon after Vergil's death in 19 BC. The Laocoon group is probably a little earlier, but we cannot fix the chronology precisely enough to say whether or not Vergil's version was current at the time of its composition, though it may have circulated through recitations before the poem was officially published.¹⁴⁴ There were, however, other versions of the myth that offered rather different explanations for Laocoon's fate.

¹⁴¹ Häuber 2006; 2014: 619–24.

¹⁴² The date was fixed by epigraphic evidence for the three Rhodian sculptors; see Rice 1986; Kunze 1996. Kunze 1996, 2009, argues for a date for Sperlonga and hence also for the Laocoon of c. 30–20 BC. Andreae's many works on the two groups are summed up in Andreae 1988, which argues that both groups are copies of earlier Hellenistic originals. See reviews by Ridgway 1989 and R. R. Smith 1991, both arguing instead that the works should be seen primarily as Roman creations. For an annotated bibliography see Häuber and Schütz 2004: 135–6.

¹⁴³ Vergil, *Aeneid* 2.40–56, 199–249.

¹⁴⁴ Earlier visual representations of the myth are also known, which presumably relied on this earlier tradition, and may have informed the sculptors of the Laocoon.

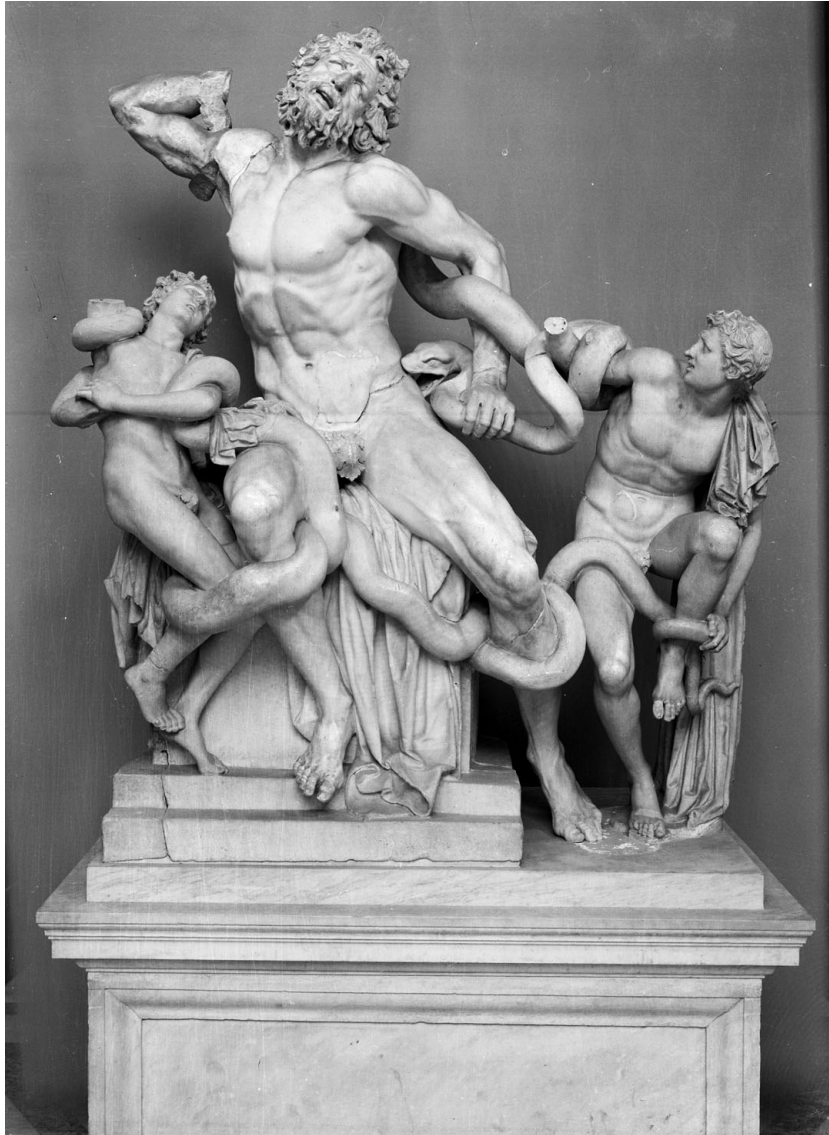


Figure 2.15 Statue of Laocöon. Vatican, Cortile del Belvedere.

According to Hyginus and Servius (citing Euphorion), Laocöon was a priest of Apollo who had angered the god through his *hubris* either in marrying and having children against Apollo's wishes, or by having sex with his wife in Apollo's sanctuary. Hyginus says that Apollo sent snakes to kill him and his children, the results of this illicit union, while he was sacrificing to Poseidon, and that the Trojans interpreted his death

as being due to his acts against the Trojan horse.¹⁴⁵ Elsewhere his death is taken as a sign of the impending destruction of Troy which motivated Aeneas and Anchises to leave the city for Mount Ida.¹⁴⁶ According to these interpretations Laocoon's death was due to his own sin of offence to Apollo, but also acted as a broader portent for the destruction of Troy and a warning to Laocoon's brother, Anchises, to leave the city. The question, then, is which of these interpretations the statue group was most likely to evoke. As R. R. R. Smith has argued, the explanation of Laocoon's death as due to his own acts seem the better fit with the Laocoon statue, explaining the pain meted out on the figure as the punishment of his earlier *hubris*.¹⁴⁷ Just as the Niobids, Marsyas and Actaeon all suffered for acts of *hubris*, intentional or not, so too Laocoon's disobedience brings about the death of himself and his sons.

This interpretation of the statue group stresses the authority and vengeance of the slighted god, Apollo. We do not know if the group had always been on display in the area of the Gardens of Maecenas, or the precise circumstances of its display, but its location in the gardens set up by Augustus' cultural advisor suggests that it may well have been associated with the imperial court even before it passed into the ownership of Titus.¹⁴⁸ In an Augustan context it would have set up resonances with Octavian/Augustus' identification with the god Apollo, and the representation of the Niobids and mythological warnings against *hubris* in the sanctuaries of Apollo Sosianus and Apollo on the Palatine. There may also have been resonances with other myths displayed in the area of the Gardens of Maecenas, such as the red Marsyas group discussed above, which also displays the frightening might of the god Apollo.¹⁴⁹

It is possible that the group took on additional resonances after the publication of the *Aeneid*. Andreae has argued that for the Romans the death of Laocoon represents the sacrifice which was necessary for

¹⁴⁵ Hyginus, *Fabulae* 135; Servius, *ad Aen.* 2.201; he also mentions Bacchylides. Hyginus' account, dated to the second century AD, integrates Vergil's version with the older version of Laocoon punished for his sins. Sophocles also wrote a tragedy on Laocoon; see Pearson 1917, II: 38–47. Nesselrath 2009 gives a detailed discussion of the variants of the myth.

¹⁴⁶ Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* Epitome 5.18; Nesselrath 2009: 2–6 suggests that Apollodorus here alludes to the version in Arctinus' *Iliupersis*, also repeated by Sophocles. See also Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 1.46–8 on the various stories about Aeneas' flight, citing Sophocles' version at 1.48.2.

¹⁴⁷ R. R. R. Smith 1991: 356–7.

¹⁴⁸ Häuber earlier suggested a display in a portico (Häuber and Schütz 2004: 131–3, 136) but now thinks it possible that it decorated a nymphaeum or cult room (Häuber 2014: 618, 625).

¹⁴⁹ See Häuber 2014: 624–6.

the founding of Rome.¹⁵⁰ While the group probably predates Vergil, the fame that Vergil's version of the Trojan myth attracted may have given the statue broader resonances with the Trojan myth that had led to the origins of Rome. However, these associations require contextualisation of the episode in its mythological history, rather than focussing on Laocoon's death in particular. The overwhelming visual impact of the group is of pain and suffering rather than resignation or acceptance; Laocoon here is the object of divine power, though viewers with knowledge of the various versions of the myth might have debated whether he was an innocent victim, serving as a cipher for the destruction of Troy, or culpable in his own fate.¹⁵¹ This statue shows the potential for mythological images to provoke a number of interpretations, acting as intellectual challenges, but also as powerful visual players that drew on the emotions to assert the power of the gods while also implicitly evoking the authority of the emperor.

Love, Violence and Revelry in the *Horti Sallustiani*

In order to explore further the interweaving of mythological themes in Roman *horti*, and the different responses they could evoke, I will finish this chapter with a discussion of the sculptural decoration of a particularly lavish villa garden, the *Horti Sallustiani* in Rome.¹⁵² The *Horti Sallustiani* lay in the area between the Pincian and Quirinal hills, to the northeast of Rome, and seem to have consisted of the valley between the two hills and architectural structures along its sides (fig. 2.16). They were probably first laid out by the historian Sallust and then passed to his nephew and heir, before entering imperial ownership in the first century AD.¹⁵³ While the early gardens would also have been decorated with sculptures and buildings, many of the architectural remains date from later periods of refurbishment under the emperors.¹⁵⁴ In particular, an ancient

¹⁵⁰ Andreae 1988: esp. 182–5. The argument involves two stages of interpretation: seeing Laocoon as symbolic of the Fall of Troy (Andreae's interpretation of the meaning of the original Greek group), and reading that destruction as necessary for the birth of Rome.

¹⁵¹ Lahusen 1999: 296 suggests that the group leaves it open which version of the myth it is following. For the tragic qualities of Laocoon see R. R. R. Smith 1991: 357 and A. Stewart 2006: 144–9. On the treatment of suffering in the statue see Muth 2009.

¹⁵² For a comprehensive discussion see Hartswick 2004.

¹⁵³ See Horace, *Odes* 2.2 and Tacitus, *Annals* 3.30 on the younger Sallust, a friend of the emperor Augustus. Hartswick 2004: 8–11 discusses ownership, rejecting the supposed association with Julius Caesar.

¹⁵⁴ On Vespasian in the gardens see Dio 66.10.4.

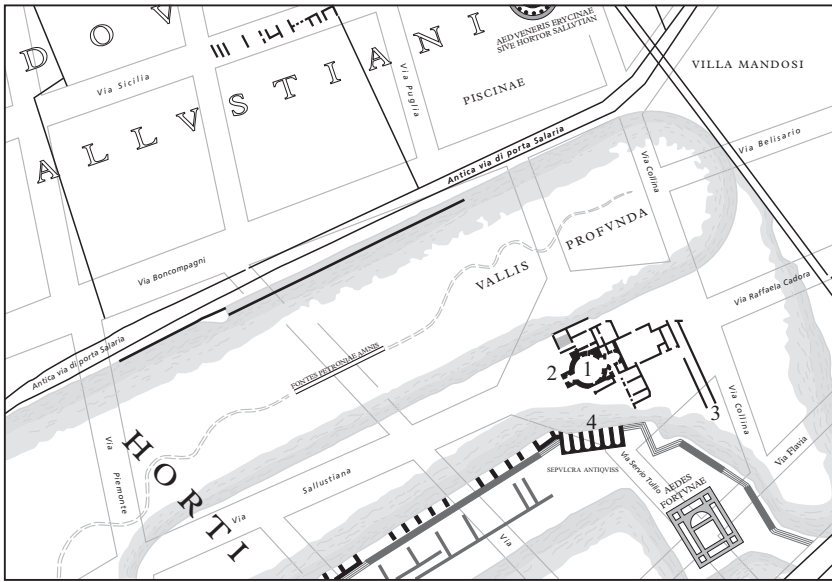


Figure 2.16 Map of the *Horti Sallustiani*. 1: Vestibule; 2: findspot of paedagogus statue; 3: findspot of Rome Niobid; 4: probable display spot of Artemis and Iphigenia group.

structure in the Piazza Sallustio is constructed from bricks with Hadrianic stamps, suggesting refurbishment of this area of the gardens at that time (fig. 2.17).¹⁵⁵ This structure has formerly been called a Temple of Venus and a nymphaeum, but is identified by Hartswick as a form of vestibule, linking the upper slope of the Quirinal to the valley bottom, where a lavish circular room looked out onto the gardens beyond.¹⁵⁶ The main residential part of the gardens may have been formed by a U-shaped pavilion on the Pincian hill, shown in a sixteenth-century plan of the gardens.¹⁵⁷ However, it is the finds from the valley bottom which will primarily concern us here.

In the Renaissance the area once occupied by the gardens was divided up into a number of vineyards with different owners, some of which yielded sculptural finds, but the majority of finds were made in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly in the building boom of the 1880s. At this period much of the gardens was split between the ownership of the Ludovisi, who owned property on the Pincian hill, and

¹⁵⁵ See Lehmann-Hartleben and Lindros 1935 for an account of the building, esp. 213–17 on dating (after AD 126).

¹⁵⁶ Hartswick 2004: 37–51 with further bibliography.

¹⁵⁷ Hartswick 2004: 31–6 reviews the evidence.



Figure 2.17 View of the Hadrianic vestibule in the *Horti Sallustiani*, Rome.

Josef Spithoever, who possessed the valley and the area on the Quirinal hill. The estates of the Villa Ludovisi and Villa Spithoever both became areas of development, in the course of which numerous sculptural finds came to light.¹⁵⁸

Among the sculptures associated with the gardens are a number of Dionysiac figures.¹⁵⁹ They span the whole length of the gardens, centring on the valley between the Pincian and Quirinal hills. From one end of the valley a statue of a Silenus with the baby Dionysus and a krater decorated with Dionysiac themes are said to have come from the property of Carlo Muti sometime in the sixteenth century.¹⁶⁰ This lay to the west of the valley and can be associated with the wall with niches which is still visible on Via Lucullo and seems to have marked the western extent of a hippodrome-shaped garden that occupied the valley bottom.¹⁶¹ Whether the sculptures were displayed inside or outside the hippodrome cannot now be ascertained, though other Dionysiac pieces certainly seem to have come from within.

¹⁵⁸ On ownership of the gardens after antiquity see Hartswick 2004: 20–30. Moltesen 2012: 105–29 discusses the finds made in the gardens, many of which made their way into Carl Jacobsen's Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen.

¹⁵⁹ Hartswick 2004: 108–15 with full references.

¹⁶⁰ Louvre Ma 922, Ma 86; Hartswick 2004: 80–1, 179 n. 223. ¹⁶¹ Hartswick 2004: 58–60.

Hartswick suggests that a number of Dionysiac sculptures also come from the eastern end of the gardens near the vestibule in the current Piazza Sallustio. A statue of a 'Praxitelean faun' was recorded among the statues in the Villa Spithoever in the 1880s and may be a statue discovered in April 1882 on the Via Flavia, close to the vestibule.¹⁶² It has been tentatively identified with a statue now in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, though it is possible that this is a different statue of the Resting Satyr type, also found in the area of the Gardens of Sallust.¹⁶³ The evidence seems to point to at least one, and maybe more, Resting Satyrs from the eastern end of the valley of the Gardens of Sallust, possibly from the slopes of the Pincian. In addition to these, excavations in 1908 in the Via Flavia to the southeast of the vestibule also revealed a small Papposilenus statue and a double-sided relief decorated with Dionysiac themes.¹⁶⁴ Other statues of a faun on a wineskin, a faun riding a goat and a tied goat were found nearby.¹⁶⁵ Overall, a broad range of Dionysiac sculptures helped to evoke the mythological realm in the gardens.

Yet the Gardens of Sallust were not only populated by the attendants of Dionysus but also showed the presence of other divine figures. Epigraphic evidence suggests that there was a Temple to Venus/Aphrodite present within the gardens, possibly the older Temple of Venus Erycina near the Porta Collina which may have been incorporated into the gardens when they were laid out, though the evidence is inconclusive.¹⁶⁶ However, statues of Apollo and Artemis were certainly found here. A fragment of a draped leg, from a statue of Apollo Citharoedus, leader of the Muses, was found to the north or northwest of the vestibule.¹⁶⁷ A group of Artemis, Iphigenia and a deer, now restored and on display in Copenhagen, came

¹⁶² The statue is described as 'a youth, partially wrapped in a mantle, 1.3 m high and missing only the left arm': Lanciani 1906: 172; see also 175 stating that Lanciani saw some of these statues in the Villa Spithoever in 1888. Talamo 1998: 145 cites a letter written by Lanciani in 1882 in which he claims to have seen the same group of statues. For further discussion see Hartswick 2004: 96.

¹⁶³ Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek inv. 474. Another replica in Copenhagen inv. 2237, from the Villa Borghese, may also come from the gardens. Moltesen 1998: 186 and Hartswick 2004: 96, 112 discuss the attributions.

¹⁶⁴ Papposilenus: Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano in the Palazzo Massimo; relief: Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts inv. 5668. Vaglieri 1908: 347–50; Hartswick 2004: 112–15, figs. 3.20–1.

¹⁶⁵ Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 72; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art no. 10.151; Vaglieri 1908: 382–3; Pasqui 1909: 7; Hartswick 2004: 114–15 with figs. 3.22–4.

¹⁶⁶ Hartswick 2004: 68–82. The Ludovisi throne, which was found in the northern part of the gardens, may also be associated with the cult of Venus: Hartswick 2004: 119–21; Moltesen 2012: 107–12.

¹⁶⁷ Rome, Museo Capitolino; Hartswick 2004: 98–9, 138. It was originally erroneously recorded as a Niobid (Lanciani 1906: 175). On the type, see Roccas 2002.



Figure 2.18 Statue group of Artemis, Iphigenia and the deer. Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek IN 481–2a.

from an underground room near the Piazza Sallustio and seems to have decorated a nymphaeum set into the retaining wall of the Quirinal hill and overlooking the valley bottom (fig. 2.18, 4 on fig. 2.16).¹⁶⁸ Recent research has shown that the Artemis statue was originally gilded, enhancing the

¹⁶⁸ Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek IN 481–2a. Hartswick 2004: 85–96 gives a detailed reappraisal of the evidence; see also Moltesen 2012: 118–20.



Figure 2.19 Statue of a nymph; London, British Museum inv. 145689.

prestige of the statue and perhaps evoking a cult image of the goddess.¹⁶⁹ Statues of nymphs were also present. Two reclining female figures (the so-called Astragal players now in Göttingen and London) were found in the area to the north of the vestibule, in the Vigna Verospi (fig. 2.19).¹⁷⁰ On each, a bow is carved on the base, which identifies them as nymphs of the goddess Artemis, taking their ease near a pool of water.¹⁷¹ Taken together, the finds of sculptures of the retinue of Dionysus, Apollo and Artemis and her nymphs across the length of the valley, but especially at its western end, suggest the recreation here of the aura of a divine landscape.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* it is precisely through his intrusion into a valley such as this that the hunter Actaeon meets his terrible fate after seeing the goddess Artemis/Diana bathing.¹⁷² Angered at the slight to her divinity, the goddess turns him into a deer, whereupon he is torn to death by his own hunting hounds. We have seen above that this myth could be

¹⁶⁹ Sargent and Therkildsen 2010.

¹⁷⁰ London, British Museum inv. 145689; Göttingen, Archäologisches Institut.

¹⁷¹ Hartswick 2004: 116.

¹⁷² Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.155–82; see Newby 2012: 356–7. On Ovid's use of sensual landscapes as the location for violence see Parry 1964; Segal 1969; Hinds 2002: esp. 140–9 on overlaps with painting.



Figure 2.20 Statue of the paedagogus to the Niobids, Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 380382.

represented in visual form, in both statuary and mythological landscape paintings (figs. 2.13–14). In the *Horti Sallustiani*, however, it was another example of divine punishment that reified the divine potential of these gardens: that of the Niobids.

A number of finds suggest that the myth of the deaths of the Niobids was depicted in the eastern end of the valley garden.¹⁷³ The first statue to be found was a draped male figure, now recognised as the paedagogus to the Niobids, which was discovered in 1840 during restoration works to the vestibule structure in the Piazza Sallustio (fig. 2.20).¹⁷⁴ It was discovered

¹⁷³ For reports of the finds see Talamo 1998: 145–8; Moltesen 1998; 2012: 113–16; Hartswick 2004: 93–104. There are a number of misidentifications and contradictions in the report by Lanciani 1906. Diacciati 2005: 203–6 only discusses the Paedagogus figure, believing the reused statues to have been displayed elsewhere.

¹⁷⁴ Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 380382.



Figure 2.21 Statue of a dying female Niobid, Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 72274.

in the foundations of the left pilaster of the entrance to the rotunda (2 on [fig. 2.16](#)).¹⁷⁵ A second figure in the Museo Nazionale Romano, that of a wounded female Niobid ([fig. 2.21](#)), was found nearby in 1906 in an underground passageway near the Via Collina (3 on [fig. 2.16](#)).¹⁷⁶

Two other statues of Niobids, now in the Ny Carlsberg Museum in Copenhagen, are also likely to come from this area of the gardens, though the reports surrounding their discovery are somewhat confused. The first, a lying male figure with an arrow wound in the neck, was purchased by Carl Jacobsen in 1888 from Joseph Spithoever, the owner of this area of the *Horti Sallustiani* ([fig. 2.22](#)).¹⁷⁷ It may be identical with a figure

¹⁷⁵ Candilio 1990: 206 n. 98 cites the report.

¹⁷⁶ Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 72274; Lanciani 1906: 157; Rizzo 1906.

¹⁷⁷ Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Cat. 399, IN 472; Letter of Wolfgang Helbig to Carl Jacobsen 13.1.1888, cited by Moltesen 1998: 177 n. 9.



Figure 2.22 Statue of a dying male Niobid, Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Cat. 399, IN 472.

described by Lanciani as a statue of Endymion (often shown with his arm above his head), found in a ‘deep and narrow passage’, though conflicting reports make it hard to state more than the fact that it came from the Spithoever territory sometime in the 1880s.¹⁷⁸ The second statue is a fleeing girl, now also identified as a Niobid (fig. 2.23).¹⁷⁹ Reports about her findspot are contradictory. Initial reports suggested a degree of secrecy over the findspot, with one suggestion that it came from the Esquiline.¹⁸⁰ Later, however, Wolfgang Helbig asserted that it had been found in the Vigna Spithoever, very close to the place where the Rome Niobid was later found.¹⁸¹ The statue is stylistically very similar to the male statue in Copenhagen, making it likely that the two statues were reused together in the gardens. The initial misleading report about its provenance can probably be attributed to the fact that Spithoever had sold this area of land to a consortium, which may have concealed the true provenance of

¹⁷⁸ Hartwick 2004: 96 reviews the evidence. See Moltesen 1998: 179 on the identification with the ‘Endymion’.

¹⁷⁹ Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Cat. 398, IN 520.

¹⁸⁰ Letter of Wolfgang Helbig to Carl Jacobsen 1.2.1888, cited by Moltesen 1998: 178 n. 16; Arndt 1896: 65.

¹⁸¹ The German text is quoted in Brunn 1932, commentary to pls. 712–14 (P. Arndt).



Figure 2.23 Statue of a running female Niobid, Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Cat. 398, IN 520.

the statue to hide the fact that they had made a valuable discovery on the land.

The two Copenhagen statues and the female Niobid in Rome are all believed to be Greek originals, most likely taken from the pediment of a Greek temple and brought to Rome at some point in the Republican or Augustan period.¹⁸² The paedagogus statue has been identified as a Roman copy, added to the ensemble in the Hadrianic period.¹⁸³ While the provenances of the Copenhagen statues are less secure than the Rome Niobid and paedagogus, the combined evidence points towards all four statues being found in the area around the vestibule. The reused statues

¹⁸² For various views on the dating and provenance of the statues, as well as their display in Rome, see Moltesen 1981; 2012: 116; La Rocca 1985: 71–2, 75–8, 80–1; Talamo 1998: 146.

¹⁸³ Candilio 1990: 210.

may have entered the *Horti Sallustiani* early on in the gardens' history and were later reinvigorated, perhaps in the Hadrianic period, with the addition of the figure of the paedagogus and possibly other figures, now lost.

Full details of the display of these statues are lacking, but we can suggest some likely features of it. The paedagogus was found at the base of the vestibule's entrance, while the Rome Niobid and those sculptures discovered during building works of the 1880s were found at significant depths below the modern street level, at a level roughly equivalent to that of the ancient valley floor. While their theme links them together, the statues were not found in one place but scattered throughout this area of the gardens. A landscape setting would suit the details of the myth, which is usually represented as having taken place outdoors, while the Niobids were either hunting or exercising.¹⁸⁴ The statues here were probably originally set into natural plantings, though the discovery of the Rome Niobid in a passageway suggests they may have been moved into covered rooms at a later point in their history. Outdoor settings are attested elsewhere and would make best sense for the Niobid statues, whose common theme suggests that they were designed to be seen as a group, while their scattered findspots indicate that they were not displayed grouped together, but rather spaced out throughout this area of the valley.

If so, they would have been encountered as if by accident by visitors wandering through the gardens, sharing the same space as these mythological victims. The viewing experience can be reconstructed as follows: as the viewer moves from the vestibule out onto the valley bottom, gleaming figures appear amidst the plantings. On closer inspection, they reveal themselves to be Niobids. A young woman flees, another falls to her knees, her drapery slipping to reveal her naked body as she wrestles to free herself from the arrow in her back. A male youth lies on the ground, already wounded, while his paedagogus runs fruitlessly to his aid. The overall atmosphere of a divine valley, achieved by other elements of the sculptural display, set up the villa as a sacred space, peopled by the attendants of the gods. Whilst on one level this elevated the experience, allowing guests to roam freely in a Dionysiac world, the images of the Niobids lend a darker note, indicating the divine wrath that could fall upon hapless

¹⁸⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 6.218–47 has the boys killed while riding and exercising. In a wall-painting in the Casa del Marinaio, Pompeii VII. 15, 2, room z', they are shown hunting: Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 111479.

mortals. Like Actaeon intruding into the goddess Diana's sacred valley of Gargaphie, as described by Ovid, the viewer here too may be an intruder, and the violent punishment of those who offend the gods is evident before his eyes.

These examples of the vengeance of Artemis and Apollo were complemented by the representations of the gods themselves displayed elsewhere in the gardens. While the deaths of the Niobids show Artemis's jealous guarding of her prestige, another sculptural group shows her capacity to save innocent mortals, in her protection of Iphigenia (fig. 2.18). Statues of the gods in non-narrative scenes, such as the fragment of Apollo Citharoedus, assert their patronage of the gardens, and help to define its atmosphere and the interests of its owner, while the representations of particular mythological events concretise the powers of those gods, asserting that they are not simply figureheads but possess real abilities to punish and save.

The languid sensuality and revelry of the Dionysiac figures from the gardens are complemented and contrasted by the violence and pain meted out on the Niobids, who struggle to free themselves from the arrows that pierce them. Yet even here, the figures might also evoke an erotic thrill. The body of the Niobid in the Museo Nazionale Romano is fully exposed to the viewer (fig. 2.21). As she struggles to free herself from the arrow in her back, her dress falls to reveal her naked torso. Her terror allows us to see her exposed body. Just such a linking of violence and erotic voyeurism can be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where fleeing and fearful women are often described as even more beautiful as flight reveals their naked limbs and terror enhances their beauty.¹⁸⁵

Erotic appreciation might also have been evoked by the figures of the resting nymphs, discussed above, whose left breasts are exposed, and by the figure of Iphigenia, as well as by another figure found in the gardens, a statue of Leda and the swan. This statue is of a type known in a number of other replicas that are often seen as copies of a work by the fourth-century sculptor Timotheus, though on fairly tenuous grounds.¹⁸⁶ It was

¹⁸⁵ See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.525–7: *nudabant corpora venti, obviaque adversas vibrabant flamina vestes*, 'the winds laid bare her body and its gusts shook her garments, blowing them behind her' on Daphne; 4.230: *ipse timor decuit*, 'fear itself became her' of Leucothoe. See Richlin 1992: esp. 162–6.

¹⁸⁶ No literary evidence names a statue of Leda by Timotheus and the association rests on stylistic similarities with the sculptures from the Temple of Asclepius at Epidaurus, where Timotheus worked: Rieche 1978.

apparently found in the same ‘deep and narrow passageway’ in the territory of the Villa Spithoever as the statues of ‘Endymion’ (probably the lying male Niobid), a Niobid (of which no more is said or known), a replica of the Praxitelean Faun and a ram in red marble, suggesting an original display in this eastern end of the valley.¹⁸⁷ As we have seen above, it is possible that the Faun is the same as a statue found in 1882 in the building of the Via Flavia. The statue of Leda has been identified as one now in the Copenhagen Glyptotek.¹⁸⁸ The erotic aspect of the myth is highlighted by its presentation in this statue. While other versions of the myth may show Leda carrying the swan, as she attempts to protect it from a rapacious eagle (a cunning ruse by Zeus to get her to embrace him, in the form of a swan), here the swan was nestled into her groin, and Leda herself shown virtually naked.¹⁸⁹ Nothing in the statue itself suggests a particular form of display, but it is notable that a number of other replicas of the type include a rocky support. Rieche suggests that this is a Roman addition to the type, explicitly designed to suit its use as a garden sculpture, and indeed a copy from Formia with a rocky support has been associated with a villa there.¹⁹⁰

Taken together, the sculptural finds from the area of the valley suggest the recreation of a world redolent of divine power, violence and eroticism. Visitors to the gardens could see themselves as entering into a divine realm, voyeurs of the erotic and violent scenes displayed to them, but also implicated in those same temptations and dangers through their presence in the very same space as the victims of the gods.

Conclusions

This chapter has shown that the mythological images displayed in elite villas could elicit a range of responses. While some statues and paintings

¹⁸⁷ Lanciani 1906: 175. He says that he saw the sculptures in 1888. No other reports mention this Niobid and it could be due to a confusion by Lanciani. Talamo 1998: 145 cites a letter by Lanciani of 21.6.1882 in which he says that he saw the same group of sculptures, excluding the Niobid, in 1882. See further Hartswick 2004: 96 n. 63.

¹⁸⁸ Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Cat. 366, IN 1834; Hartswick 2004: 136, fig. 3.45. See Moltesen 1998: 184–5 and 2012: 120–1 for an account of its route, via a number of other dealers and collectors.

¹⁸⁹ See Kahil, Icard-Gianolio and Linart de Bellefonds 1992 for an iconographical survey with further bibliography.

¹⁹⁰ Rieche 1978: 49–51. On the Formia copy see Rieche 1978: 32, no. 10; Neudecker 1998: 45 n. 437.

may have been appreciated for their aesthetic merits, the majority seem to have been chosen for the subject matter. Generic images of the mythological realm set up the space of the villa as one of theatricality, divine power and exoticism, while the re-enactment of particular mythological narratives in sculpted form helped to reify the divine atmosphere, taking their viewers directly into the experience of ancient myth, while also calling forth erudite and intellectualised responses.

I have concentrated in particular here on two rather different types of mythological narratives, the Odyssean adventures portrayed in the grottoes at Sperlonga and Castel Gandolfo and the violent punishments of *hubris* represented in the images of the Niobids, Marsyas and Laocoon. The interplay between art, landscape and literature in these two categories of myths sets up a number of different resonances. The Polyphemus and Scylla sculptures use the powerful forms of the Hellenistic baroque to evoke the struggles of humans against forces of nature. As guests at Sperlonga rowed past Scylla or edged around the grotto past the figure of Polyphemus in the flickering lamplight, they could share in the terrors encountered by Odysseus and his men. Accustomed to the theatrical masques that commonly took place in the villa, they could see this vicarious engagement with myth as part of the pleasures of a villa sojourn. The fact that Odysseus will be victorious over these forces also allows the diner to relax in the knowledge that the dangers will soon be past. The display here draws on the Late Republican tradition of villa play-acting but also opens the way to a new engagement with myth that implicates the viewer more directly in the experience evoked.

Yet these images also present an erudite challenge, inviting viewers to draw on their knowledge of classical literature and mythography to identify the characters present, and to link the different episodes together in a programmatic reading.¹⁹¹ At Sperlonga viewers could compare literary traditions about Odysseus, or ponder the different sides of his character, while at Castel Gandolfo the Polyphemus statue combines two literary traditions about the Cyclops, as monster or as bucolic shepherd. The ensembles suggest the literary erudition of the Roman *cena*, as well as the theatricality and escapism that were part of the villa life-style, while the re-enactment of these myths in Roman landscapes symbolically draws Greek literature, myth, history and culture into the framework of Roman power.

¹⁹¹ On the importance of mythographic traditions see Cameron 2004 and Trzaskoma and Smith 2013.

A similar invitation to absorption in a mythological world can be seen in the display of the deaths of the Niobids in landscaped settings. Here, however, the atmosphere is darker and more sombre. Rather than the trials of Odysseus, which we know he will overcome, the viewer is faced with the victims of divine retribution, punished for their mother's *hubris*. The vengeance taken against them is unrelenting. This might lead us to sympathise with these figures, seeing them as hapless victims of a greater power. However, the eroticism of the statues can also distance the viewer from them, allowing them to be enjoyed voyeuristically as images enhanced by their terror and pain, similar to the mythological events staged as punishments in Roman spectacle culture.¹⁹² Yet the placement of these images within the same space as the viewer also breaks down the illusion of distance between viewer and spectacle, suggesting an uncomfortable elision between the viewer and these mythological victims. Other violent subjects also appear in *horti* and villa settings, such as the punishments of Marsyas, Actaeon and Laocoon.¹⁹³

While the landscape display of such sculptures in villa gardens would have enhanced their illusionism, helping to create the aura of a divine realm, the public resonances of these myths are also likely to have been present in the minds of their viewers, particularly for statues displayed in the city of Rome. Under Augustus the myth of the Niobids took on a public political message. Along with the repulsion of the Gauls from Mount Parnassus it featured on the doors of Augustus' Temple of Apollo on the Palatine, as a sign of the power of the god to punish those who acted against him.¹⁹⁴ Given Augustus' identification with the god, the myth also acted as an allegory of Augustus' own victories against those who opposed him.¹⁹⁵ Myths such as those of the Niobids, as well as Marsyas and Actaeon, could act as warnings not to challenge the power of the gods and those they favoured.¹⁹⁶ When displayed in imperial *horti* the resonances of such myths might have been extended, acting not just as proof of the powers of Apollo or Artemis and of the dangers of incursion

¹⁹² Coleman 1990.

¹⁹³ The punishment of Dirce group may also have been displayed in Asinius Pollio's gardens. See pp. 41–2 above on this statue and the Farnese Bull group, found in the Baths of Caracalla. There is debate over whether the group Pliny describes in the collection of Asinius Pollio was displayed in his library or gardens, and also whether the Farnese Bull statue found in the Baths of Caracalla is the original statue or a Severan-period copy.

¹⁹⁴ Propertius 2.31.12–14.

¹⁹⁵ See Kellum 1985; Lefèvre 1989; Galinsky 1996: 213–24; and Chapter 1, above.

¹⁹⁶ See Weis 1992: 57–83 for a reading of the red Marsyas statue as a warning by Sulla.

into the divine realm, but also suggesting the power of the guests' quasi-divine host, the emperor. As we have seen, the historical sources present a rhetoric of concern about the shifting boundaries between viewers and victims in imperially sponsored public spectacles. Within the confines of the imperial gardens a viewer of the sculptures of the Niobids, particularly under a despotic emperor like Gaius or Domitian, might also with some justification wonder if he could soon become a victim of similar violence.

Our evidence about the precise display of these sculptures, as well as the periods at which they were sculpted or redisplayed in Rome, is too hazy to draw firm conclusions about where and when mythological groups were displayed in Roman villas, and how their associations changed. The Polyphemus and Scylla groups from the Ninfeo Bergantino at Castel Gandolfo show that we are not simply dealing here with a move from open-ended erudite challenges and imaginative entertainment at Sperlonga to a more closed stress on the quasi-imperial punishment of *hubris* in the first and second centuries AD. Additionally, while the bulk of our evidence does seem to come from imperial properties, scattered remains suggest that mythological groups could also be displayed elsewhere, though perhaps in less imposing forms.¹⁹⁷ Rather than a closing down of the range of meanings for mythological groups, I would suggest that the possibilities of using these to provoke intellectual displays and imaginative escapism first arose in the Late Republican period and continued throughout. However, from the period of Augustus onwards the public use of some of these myths of *hubris* to reinforce imperial power, as well as the popularity for displays of violence, including recreations of myths, in public spectacle culture, also added a darker resonance to myths of pain and violence.

In an analysis of the taste for colossal sculptural groups on violent mythological themes, such as those in the Baths of Caracalla at Rome, Ralf von den Hoff has suggested that a new 'aesthetics of horror which played on the emotions' emerged in the course of the second and third centuries AD, and suggests that it may have been actively encouraged by the emperor.¹⁹⁸ The material discussed here suggests that this taste can also be seen earlier, and was not entirely confined to the imperial sphere. While full-scale representations of the punishment of *hubris* may have had a particular resonance when displayed in an imperial space, they also seem

¹⁹⁷ See e.g. Parisi Presicce 1996 (Polyphemus) and Paris and Pettinau 2007 (Niobe). On the scarcity of mythological groups in non-imperial villas in the imperial period see von den Hoff 2004: 106–7.

¹⁹⁸ von den Hoff 2004: 123. He especially emphasises the role of *furor* in such groups, but an interest in violent spectacle can also be seen in earlier Silver-Age Latin.

to have appeared in non-imperial villas too. Some of these statues may have been valued for their aesthetic qualities, but many must primarily have been valued for their representative qualities. As actors in the recreation of a mythological drama they took the host and his guests into a realm of the imagination, but as representations of more abstract qualities, such as *virtus* or *hubris*, they could also hold out the possibility for displays of intellectual prowess and for consideration of the nature of human life and the possibilities for living well within it. It is to the rhetorical possibilities of mythological images that I turn next, in consideration of the responses invited by mythological wall-paintings.

3 | *Paideia*, Rhetoric and Self-representation: Responses to Mythological Wall-paintings

The previous two chapters have shown how the redisplay of earlier Greek mythological paintings and sculpture in Rome was part of the general reuse of Greek cultural property in assertions of Roman power. In addition to this, old and new mythological imagery could also be deployed for more specific ideological means, to act as analogies for contemporary politics, or to assert the power of the gods who presided over the spaces they adorned. In villa contexts, mythological statuary helped to set the luxurious tone of a villa, but also offered opportunities for both intellectual display and escapism into a parallel world. Thus mythological images can be read on a variety of levels: while their classicising form enhanced the overall atmosphere of public and private spaces, their mythological content also conveyed more particular messages. They can be seen as artistic objects, transportative agents and ideological messengers, offering viewers the chance to lose themselves in the fantasy world they constructed, but also to stand back and ponder on the broader significances of the power structures they revealed. In both these chapters, we can also see the images as acting as rhetorical agents, structuring the viewer's experience of the spaces they adorned through their role as analogies to contemporary events, or as rhetorical proofs of a god's or patron's power.

The next two chapters continue the focus on the domestic realm but turn to the invitations offered by mythological wall-paintings, with a particular focus on examples from Pompeii and Rome. Over the last thirty years a number of studies have established the central role the domestic sphere played within constructions of social and personal identities.¹ Studies of domestic decoration, too, have moved away from the earlier focus on Greek originals to look instead at how Roman paintings worked within their own social contexts.² Earlier studies often divorced the central mythological panels from their context, looking at them as copies of earlier Greek masterpieces, while Roman archaeologists focussed instead on defining a

¹ See especially the studies by Wallace-Hadrill 1988, 1994; also Thébert 1987; Clarke 1991; Wallace-Hadrill and Lawrence 1997; Hales 2003.

² E.g. Leach 2004.

chronology of painting based on the overall decorative frame of the wall, most famously encapsulated in Mau's Four Pompeian Styles.³ However, scholars of Roman art have recently turned against this tendency, arguing that even when the same basic scene seems to be represented in a number of Roman paintings, it was treated with great flexibility, perhaps by making changes to the background, or adding supplementary figures.⁴ Without the original to test it against, any methodology claiming to be able to strip away the Roman additions and get back to the 'original' starts to look rather suspect.⁵ Instead, scholars have argued that we should look more closely at the Roman contexts of the images, at how they worked within their decorative programmes and at the choices which Roman artists and patrons had made.

A result of this change in focus has been the growth in studies considering the responses which collections of images in domestic spaces could have evoked from their patrons and viewers. Important early work was done in the 1950s and 1960s by Schefold and Thompson, who sought to define broad programmes along moral and ethical lines, or to trace the parallels in the various ensembles of paintings discovered at Pompeii.⁶ More recently, their attempts to offer overarching interpretations applicable to broad periods or categories of Roman painting have been challenged by a series of studies focussing on the nuances and variations within individual collections.⁷

Others have built on Suzanne Muth's approach to Roman mosaics. Focussing particularly on scenes of Achilles and Hylas, she argues that the choices made in the representation of these heroes reflect a new focus on the erotic component of ideal masculinity.⁸ Trimble and Dickmann have adopted this approach to paintings, looking at the ways they framed and reflected social values, particularly around ideas of sexuality and gender

³ For an example of the earlier approach see Lippold 1951 and critique by Bergmann 1995. On the Pompeian styles see Mau 1882; this has continued to form the framework of most handbooks on Roman painting, e.g. Ling 1991, where the figural panels are treated in a later chapter. See Lorenz 2008: 8–9.

⁴ Ling 1991: 128–35; Bergmann 1995; Hodske 2007: 13–14.

⁵ For similar arguments regarding sculpture, see Marvin 1997, 2008.

⁶ Schefold 1952, revised French edition 1972; Thompson 1960, 1960–1. Preliminary work was done by Trendelenburg 1876.

⁷ E.g. Brilliant 1984; Clarke 1991; Ling 1995. See especially the work of Bettina Bergmann 1994, 1995, 1996, 1999. Zanker 1999a stresses the multivalency of mythological images. For a brief review of the scholarship see Lorenz 2008: 9–11. On viewing more generally see Elsner 1995, 2007.

⁸ Muth 1998; see also Muth 1999.

roles.⁹ More recently, Katharina Lorenz has offered a comprehensive synthesis of the different ways in which mythological images were combined in Pompeii, stressing the need to look at both the particular choices made by the painters, and the ways in which combinations of images change and nuance our interpretations of the individual paintings.¹⁰ She identifies a correlation between the types of spaces that mythological images decorate and their emphases, seeing the public spaces of the atrium and tablinum as places for the representation of normative male and female roles, whereas the paintings in more enclosed rooms often invite immersion into a more erotic fantasy world.¹¹

In his *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes explored how the pervasive imagery of the contemporary world helped to construct what it meant to be French in the 1950s.¹² In an analogous manner, we can see the themes which reappear repeatedly in the Roman domestic sphere as helping to construct a framework within which domestic and social values were debated and negotiated.¹³ Art, literature and rhetoric all worked together to construct this framework. Muth and Lorenz have stressed the need to interpret mythological images on their own terms, through direct reference to their visual choices. Thus Muth eschews reliance on literary accounts to define the meaning of individual myths, while Lorenz stresses that visual groupings follow aesthetic principles of combination which are not dependent on rhetorical categories.¹⁴ While I agree that we must focus any interpretation of mythological images on the images themselves, I will here suggest that analysis of the use made of images in literature and rhetoric can also help us to map out the interpretative possibilities.

In this chapter I analyse three texts which show how mythological images form an integral part of the construction and staging of personal identities, either by providing the raw material for displays of rhetorical or poetic skills, or through acting as a mirror for personal hopes and desires. While the texts I discuss are clearly literary and rhetorical products, influenced by the authors' own intellectual agenda, they did not exist in a vacuum, completely divorced from contemporary viewing habits, but

⁹ Trimble 2002; Dickmann 2005; see also Valladares 2006.

¹⁰ Lorenz 2008; also Lorenz 2005 and Hodske 2007. ¹¹ Lorenz 2008: 353–98.

¹² Barthes 1957, revised edition 1970.

¹³ For a statistical analysis see Hodske 2007; further bibliography below.

¹⁴ Muth 1998: 110–14; Lorenz 2005: 214–15; 2008: 261–328, esp. 272–3.

rather reflect and play with these, showing the range of responses that were possible.¹⁵

My argument in the next two chapters is that while mythological images in domestic spaces continued to play a variety of roles, their rhetorical possibilities as *exempla* of different forms of human relationships and values also became more dominant throughout the course of the first century AD.¹⁶ While we can see collections of mythological paintings in houses as reflecting a desire to recreate public *pinacothecae* on a domestic scale, the content of the mythological paintings included here also allowed them to invite a number of interpretations. As we saw in [Chapter 2](#), myths could be used as prompts for intellectualised displays of erudition, as well as for the access they offered to a fantasy world, often characterised by a voyeuristic delight in erotic or violent events. However, as Lorenz has shown, through the combination of separate myths within a room, paintings can also present and debate normative social values.¹⁷ In the [next chapter](#) we will see how this range of engagement with mythological paintings was facilitated in a number of houses from Pompeii and Rome. Here, however, I want first to outline the visual and rhetorical frameworks within which mythological paintings can be understood.

Entering the Picture Gallery

As we saw in [Chapter 1](#), picture galleries were a common feature of the public sphere, often attached to temple precincts as a repository for the numerous works of art which had entered Rome through conquest and plunder. As with other elements of public architecture, they were also echoed in the private sphere. Pliny mentions Hortensius' display of Cydias' painting of the Argonauts in a shrine in his villa, while Vitruvius includes *pinacothecae* among the rooms necessary in the houses of high-ranking men.¹⁸ These spaces could fulfil a number of reception functions, as is clear from Varro's comment that they could also accommodate dinner

¹⁵ In this I follow the approach of Elsner 1995, 2007. For analysis stressing the rhetorical nature of Philostratus' text see Webb 2006.

¹⁶ Lorenz 2008 and Hodske 2007 both analyse the changing themes of mythological paintings. Hodske (2007: 33–57) argues for a shift from moralising and exemplary images in the Third Style towards a greater focus on erotic and emotional myths in the Fourth Style; also noted by Lorenz, though she concludes (2008: 429–30) that this has more to do with the rooms where myths appear than with profound differences in approach.

¹⁷ Lorenz 2008: 261–328.

¹⁸ Pliny, *Natural History* 35.150; Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 6.5.2.



Plate 2 Room B of the Villa della Farnesina, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme.



Plate 3 Wall-painting showing Jason and Pelias from the House of Jason, Pompeii. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 111436.



Plate 4 Wall-painting showing Achilles and Polyxena from the House of Jason, Pompeii. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 111475.



Plate 5 Wall-painting showing Medea from the House of Jason, Pompeii. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 114321.



Plate 6 Wall-painting showing Paris and Helen from the House of Jason, Pompeii. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 114320.



Plate 7 Wall-painting showing Phaedra from the House of Jason, Pompeii. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 114322.



Plate 8 Wall-painting showing Zeus and Hera, from the House of the Tragic Poet, Pompeii. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9559.



Plate 9 Wall-painting showing the removal of Briseis from the House of the Tragic Poet, Pompeii. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9105.



Plate 10 Engraving of the decoration of room C in the Villa Negroni, showing Aphrodite.



Plate 11 Engraving probably of room E in the Villa Negroni, an enthroned couple.



Plate 14 View of the back wall of Tomb I, Vatican Necropolis.



Plate 15 Tomb of the Pancratii, Via Latina, Rome. Stucco decoration on the entrance wall and ceiling, showing the ransoming of Hector on the ceiling.

parties: ‘luxury allows people to do this (dine) in a picture gallery, where art provides the spectacle’.¹⁹

While our texts refer to collections of panel paintings, embedded into the walls of porticoes, the surviving archaeological evidence instead largely consists of frescoes painted directly onto the walls.²⁰ Most of the evidence comes from Campania, from villas and the town houses of Pompeii and Herculaneum, though a few remains also come from villas around Rome and the capital itself, as well as the port city of Ostia.²¹ While not all decorative ensembles imitate picture galleries, a large number do seem to allude to this form of display, though in some instances there can be a definite ambiguity between seeing the figural panels as painted panels or as vistas onto the world outside.²²

The [next chapter](#) will focus on a number of case studies which show how mythological paintings could be combined to invite particular sorts of responses. In those cases compositional and thematic features usually help to bind the images together, spurring viewers to make sense of them both individually and as a group. Here, however, we will look briefly at an example where the effect was more eclectic, combining a variety of paintings of different themes and styles in a manner which probably echoes closely the variety to be found in public galleries. This is the case in two rooms from the Villa della Farnesina in Rome.²³ The villa itself was discovered during works for a new river embankment in 1879. After the excavation of the paintings and mosaics the rest of the site was destroyed or buried in the construction of the new Lungotevere.²⁴ The paintings and mosaics are now on display in the Palazzo Massimo in Rome and come primarily from the rooms and corridors which backed a hemicycle in the northern part of the villa.

Two red-ground cubacula, B and D, open off an enclosed garden and are decorated in the form of *pinacothecae*. The back wall of each room is

¹⁹ Varro, *De re rustica* 1.59.2, commenting on the new fashion for dining in fruit orchards.

²⁰ The best overall introduction in English remains Ling 1991; see also Leach 2004 on contexts. Pliny, *Natural History* 35.4 mentions *pinacothecae* crammed with old panels (*veteribus tabulis*) but elsewhere (35.118) also criticises the new taste for fresco painting, where images are tied to the walls and cannot be rescued in cases of fire.

²¹ Within Rome see especially the ‘House of Livia’: Rizzo 1936; the House of Augustus: Iacopi 2008; as well as the Villa della Farnesina, discussed below. For an overall account see Clarke 1991.

²² For discussions of *pinacothecae* see van Buren 1938; Schefold 1972: 50–2; Bergmann 1995: 98–107; Leach 2004: 132–55. On the ambiguities between views and panel paintings, see below, n. 26.

²³ For full details see Bragantini and de Vos 1982; di Mino 1998a; and Mols and Moormann 2008.

²⁴ Bragantini and de Vos 1982: 17–21.

orientated around a large central panel with a figural scene. In room B the panel has a bluish background and shows a nymph nursing the baby Dionysus in a landscape setting while two other women look on (pl. 2). Although the framing of this panel within a lavish *aedicula* tempts us to see it as a prestigious panel painting, such as that which Hortensius enclosed within an *aedicula* in his villa at Tusculum, its placement opposite the real opening of the room to a garden also encourages us to see it as a view onto the outside world, as if through a window.²⁵

The framing of the painting is itself ambiguous. The painted architrave which tops the middle section of the wall is interrupted by the *aedicula*. However, its bottom register continues behind the columns of the *aediculae* and seems to turn round a corner, creating a sense of depth and the illusion of looking out onto a real landscape. Yet at the bottom of the frame this sense of depth is lost, with the panel appearing flat against its frame. The painting is presented both as an illusionistic view onto the outside world and as a flat painted panel of the sort that decorated picture galleries, depending on where one focuses one's gaze.²⁶ The mythological content gives a further dimension to the painting if it is taken as a view, since this glimpse of the outside world takes us not into the cityspace of Rome, but into the world of myth and the god Dionysus.

While the focal painting of the room is ambiguous about its identity, the remainder of the paintings in the room identify the villa more explicitly as a place to collect and display art.²⁷ Either side of the central *aedicula*, two winged female figures support white-ground panels in elaborate frames which show female musicians. The white ground evokes the painted marble panels that have been found in some houses and villas, while the archaistic style suggests that these are esteemed ancient art-works, displayed as aesthetic objects in a *pinacotheca*-like setting.²⁸

The long walls of the room continue the effect of a *pinacotheca*. Here, too, the decoration is articulated around large framed openings in the wall. Yet rather than giving further glimpses onto an exterior landscape, these show white-ground scenes; on the left the toilette of the goddess

²⁵ Pliny, *Natural History* 35.150. On *aediculae* as a sign of panel paintings see Leach 2004: esp. 134–5, though she underplays the ambiguity in some examples.

²⁶ This ambiguity between a panel painting and a view was the focus for intense debate between Mau and Petersen at the start of the twentieth century: Mau 1902; E. Petersen 1903; Mau 1903. See Bergmann 1999: 82. Compare Platt 2009: esp. 41–51 on the ways that the treatment of framing motifs in the room destabilises its naturalism.

²⁷ Bergmann 1995: 102–7.

²⁸ Painted marble panels thought to copy classical Greek paintings were found at Herculaneum and in the Casa del Marinaio at Pompeii; see Mielsch 1979; von Graeve 1985.

Aphrodite, seated on a throne and attended by Eros and a maidservant.²⁹ The style here is that of the Classical period, and the scene evokes the sorts of paintings which appear on white-ground lekythoi.³⁰

Further small panels showing pairs of lovers appear in the frieze at the top of the wall, some shown with open wooden shutters, alluding to the wooden *pinakes* that were displayed in picture galleries.³¹ Overall, the effect is of an eclectic assemblage of images from different periods and styles; the concern seems to be to stress the luxurious nature of the room by its display of prestigious works of art, while the scene on the back wall also serves to open up the room as if to an exterior landscape of Dionysiac delights. The paintings depicted share an interest in female figures, lovers and the gods Aphrodite and Dionysus, but beyond a general atmosphere of taste, artistic prestige and erotic delights there does not seem to be a consistent programmatic message to be discerned here. This is in contrast to later ensembles of paintings where we find images that seem deliberately combined to provoke discussion of their content.

Indeed, while some domestic collections do seem to have presented themselves as private versions of public *pinacothecae*, they were not slavish copies of those galleries, and could show independence in the choice of models and themes. While the evocation of a *pinacotheca* suggested in general terms a desire to aggrandise a house with reference to public buildings and the masterpieces they contained, the paintings themselves could invite interpretations based around their visual characteristics and subject matter, rather than limited to the identification of any putative Greek model.³² An examination of some ancient texts on the viewing of collections of paintings shows the multiplicity of approaches that were available to ancient viewers, from mute appreciation to art-historical criticism and subjective response.³³

The rest of this chapter analyses three textual accounts of viewing from the mid-first to the early third century AD. It forms the background to the discussion in [Chapter 4](#) of how selected collections of paintings from

²⁹ Note, however, Mackenzie 2011: 200–15 emphasizing the Egyptian aspects of this scene and suggesting allusions to Isis and Cleopatra.

³⁰ di Mino 1998b. ³¹ On the erotic content of these panels see Valladares 2006: 31–48.

³² See Bergmann 1995: 94–8 on the variety within Pompeian representations of subjects which are known to have featured in Greek paintings at Rome. Exact copying of famous originals does not seem to have been a major motivation, even if some paintings did ultimately trace aspects of their composition to earlier works.

³³ For an insightful examination of the different strategies for viewing available to Roman viewers, see Elsner 2007; also Elsner 1995. The discussion below of Lucian and Philostratus draws on my previous work on these texts: see Newby 2002a, 2002b and 2009 with further bibliography.

Pompeii and Rome invited these different types of viewing. Appreciation of paintings both as individual panels and as players within broader narratives is revealed in these texts, suggesting that ancient viewers could choose for themselves whether to focus on an individual image, or to draw broader comparisons and connections between a series of images. All three of these texts offer responses to mythological paintings, and form part of the larger category of literary ecphrasis, which has been well studied in recent years. There is not space here to consider the differing forms and aims of ecphrasis in detail.³⁴ Rather, I have selected these particular texts because they offer varying but complementary views on the reactions which viewers might have towards mythological images, and because they are all set within rooms that contain a combination of mythological images similar to those that we find in extant ensembles. In all three cases we can see that a viewer could use the painted decoration as material for a rhetorical tour de force, but also that more personal responses to painted images could be envisioned and that these two modes of response can be seen at various times as opposing or as deeply intertwined.

Emotional Engagement and Rhetorical Display in the *pinacotheca*

Of the many ancient texts that give insights into the strategies available for viewing visual art, we will look here at three: Encolpius' visit to a *pinacotheca* in Petronius' *Satyrica*; Lucian's description of a painted room in *On the Hall*; and the Elder Philostratus' *Imagines*. The first of these texts is roughly contemporary with Pompeian Fourth-Style paintings, while the other two were written in Greek in the second and early third centuries AD respectively. Petronius' text has the greatest claim to be set alongside the Campanian paintings discussed in the [next chapter](#). Set in southern Italy and perhaps written by one of Nero's courtiers, it seems to reflect the proclivities of contemporary Italian culture.³⁵ As writers from the Greek East, Lucian and Philostratus may at first sight seem to have less relevance for our understanding of viewing habits in Roman Italy. Both emerge from the culture of a revival of Greek rhetoric and antiquarianism

³⁴ For discussions see Bartsch 1989: 3–39; Elsner 2002; Bartsch and Elsner 2007; esp. Goldhill 2007. For a more strictly rhetorical analysis see Webb 1999, 2006, 2009.

³⁵ On the likelihood that Petronius is the courtier forced to death under Nero, as described in Tacitus, *Annals* 16.18, see Slater 1990: 7–14.

which Philostratus himself coined the Second Sophistic. Yet both were also firmly enmeshed within Roman imperial culture. Lucian seems to have had much of his success in the West, and his works often attest to the thriving market for Greek *paideia* in second-century Italy.³⁶ The *Imagines* is the work of the Elder Philostratus (Philostratus II), an Athenian sophist and rhetorician who held an important teaching post in the city of Rome and was a member of the circle of the Severan empress, Julia Domna.³⁷ This work is set in an elite villa located on the Bay of Naples, and the descriptions Philostratus offers are explicitly addressed to an audience consisting of youths from the Roman elite.³⁸

While the archaeological record is dominated by the material preserved by the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79, the evidence of Philostratus as well as the earlier villa descriptions of Statius, from the 90s AD, suggest that a culture of Hellenic refinement and artistic display survived the eruption to continue well into the third century.³⁹ All this suggests a continuity from the mid-first to the mid-third century AD, not just in collecting and display practices, but also in the desire to use one's display and response to art as a critical element in elite self-fashioning. Of course, all three texts discussed here are literary and rhetorical texts, with their own verbal dynamics and rhetorical agenda, yet they also engage with and shed light on the concerns of their wider culture, helping us to understand the full range of responses that were available to viewers of the visual arts.

The *pinacothecae* envisioned in these texts encompass both public and private spaces. In Petronius' *Satyricon* the narrator, Encolpius, enters an art gallery hung with a spectacular collection of paintings, *in pinacothecam perveni vario genere tabularum mirabilem*, including the works of the great

³⁶ Lucian is not included among Philostratus' sophists, but represents himself as a professional orator in *The Dream*. For discussions see G. Anderson 1982; Jones 1986: 6–23; Swain 1996: 299–329; 2007. Lucian, *On Salaried Posts* satirises the Roman enthusiasm for the trappings of Greek culture; Swain 1996: 312–29 discusses the tensions in Lucian's attitude to Roman power.

³⁷ Philostratus: *Lives of the Sophists* 1.481; *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 1.3.1. The Suda, s.v. *Philostratos* 421–3 identifies the author of this first set of *Imagines* with the writer of the *Lives of the Sophists* and *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. For discussion of the works attributed to the various bearers of this name see Bowersock 1969: 2–4; G. Anderson 1986: 291–6; de Lannoy 1997; Billault 2000: 5–7; Whitmarsh 2007: 31–4; Bowie 2009; Elsner 2009; and, specifically on this set of *Imagines*, Primavesi and Giuliani 2012: 27–32. There is also another set of *Imagines* attributed to the 'Younger Philostratus' who identifies himself in the preface as the Elder Philostratus' grandson.

³⁸ Philostratus, *Imagines* preface 4–5; see especially Primavesi and Giuliani 2012: 34–5 on the audience, also noting the probable fictionality of the setting (65).

³⁹ See especially Statius, *Silvae* 2.2 on the villa of Pollius Felix, with discussions by Bergmann 1991 and Newlands 2002b: 154–98.

Greek masters, Zeuxis, Protogenes and Apelles.⁴⁰ This gallery is a public space, situated in the portico of a temple.⁴¹ In the *Imagines*, however, the gallery of paintings which the narrator describes at length is set in the portico of a suburban villa just outside Naples, though its quasi-public status is revealed by the throngs of youths who come to the villa to listen to Philostratus. Here too the works of a variety of great artists are said to have been collected, though their precise names are not given.⁴² These two texts suggest that *pinacothecae* could span public and domestic spaces, and that similar responses to visual images could be evoked in both. Indeed, the blurring is such that Lucian's *oikos*, which can be translated as either 'hall' or 'house', has been taken by different scholars as either a public or a private space.⁴³

While Lucian and Philostratus' texts deal directly with the question of how to respond to the visual, the episode I discuss from the *Satyrica* is only part of Petronius' longer novel on the adventures of his anti-hero Encolpius. It does, however, show interesting overlaps with the later texts. The episode acts not just as a way to characterise Encolpius, through his response to the images he sees, but also as a satire on the types of high-blown rhetorical exegesis which painting could provoke.⁴⁴ In this episode the hero Encolpius visits a public *pinacotheca* just after he has been jilted by his male love Giton. Though he starts off with a typical connoisseurial appreciation of this collection of old masters and their naturalism, he soon singles out those paintings which most closely mirror his own experience – Jupiter's love for Ganymede, the theft of Hylas and the accidental killing of Hyacinth by his lover Apollo.⁴⁵ Encolpius exclaims, 'thus love touches even the gods,' but considers these examples to be more fortunate than himself.⁴⁶ This sort of emotional reaction to a painted image can be paralleled elsewhere. In Plutarch's *Life of Brutus*, Brutus' wife Portia compares her situation at her husband's departure with that of Andromache, depicted in a painting which Portia repeatedly revisits, weeping.⁴⁷ It is also typical of the use of mythological *exempla* in poetry and funerary consolations, where erotic disappointments or grief at the

⁴⁰ Petronius, *Satyrica* 83. ⁴¹ Petronius, *Satyrica* 90.

⁴² Philostratus, *Imagines* 1 preface 4–5.

⁴³ Thomas 2007: 229 comments on the ambiguity, but suggests that most take it as a public hall; Goldhill 2001b: 166 translates it as house.

⁴⁴ Petronius, *Satyrica* 83–90. For discussions see Slater 1987; Elsner 1993, revised as Elsner 2007: 177–99; Rimell 2002: 60–76; Baier 2010.

⁴⁵ See, however, Elsner 2007: 183–4 on the jokes in Encolpius' comments.

⁴⁶ Petronius, *Satyrica* 83. ⁴⁷ Plutarch, *Brutus* 23, discussed by Zanker 1999a: 40–1.

death of a loved one are alleviated through the evocation of mythological or historical figures who had suffered similarly.⁴⁸

Encolpius' subjective reading of the paintings sees them primarily in terms of his own unhappy lovelife. His desire to see allusions to his own situation even leads him to distort the actual image seen; thus a painting of Hylas resisting an amorous nymph is identified as one evoking his own, thwarted, homosexual love, through reference to Hylas' male lover, Hercules, even though Heracles does not seem to feature in the painting.⁴⁹ This offers a parody of a type of viewing in which the significance of an image rests primarily on the ability to read its content as an analogy to the situation of the viewer.⁵⁰ Yet Encolpius' musings are cut short by the arrival of a different sort of viewer, the poet/philosopher Eumolpus. Encolpius seizes upon this new arrival and prevails upon him to act as exegete and interpret the images for him.⁵¹ Eumolpus' interpretation of the paintings is very different from that of Encolpius. After a pseudo-philosophical/art-historical discourse on the degeneracy of art and morality, he turns to a painting of the Fall of Troy which he makes the subject of an ecphrastic poem. This seems to have much more to do with literary models, such as *Aeneid* Book 2, than anything the speaker may have seen in the painting.⁵²

Eumolpus' sudden decision to give an ecphrastic reading of a single image has a number of resonances with the attitudes towards viewing and speaking about art which we find in the later texts by Lucian and Philostratus. Eumolpus ends his diatribe against contemporary degeneracy by saying: 'But I see that you are stuck to that painting, which shows the Fall of Troy. And so, I will try to explain the work in verse.'⁵³ The use of the word *sed*, 'but', gives the clear impression that Eumolpus' audience, Encolpius, has deserted him; rather than listening to his speech he has turned his attention instead to a painting. Eumolpus' strategy to retrieve

⁴⁸ On the uses of myth in love elegy see Whitaker 1983; Griffin 1986. On consolations see Chapter 6, below, and Newby 2014.

⁴⁹ Heracles does not appear in extant paintings of Hylas and the nymphs, as noted by Elsner 2007: 185 n. 36.

⁵⁰ It is also related to the use of paintings to foreshadow the fates of the protagonist in the Greek novels: see e.g. Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon* 1.1–2; 3.6–7; Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* proem with Zeitlin 1990; Bartsch 1989: 40–79; Elsner 2007: 185 n. 33 with further bibliography. In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* 2.4 a marble group of Actaeon and Diana foreshadows the narrator's own fate.

⁵¹ Petronius, *Satyricon* 88; see Elsner 2007: 190–1 on the joke of Encolpius' choosing as his exegete a man who also presents himself as a seducer of boys.

⁵² For discussion of the literary references to the *Aeneid* throughout this episode see Zeitlin 1971: 58–67; Connors 1998: 84–99; Rimell 2002: 66–71.

⁵³ Petronius, *Satyricon* 89.

that attention is to vie with the painting in words, to reveal its significance (*pandere*, ‘open’) in his own metier of verse. It has not often been noted that this situation echoes precisely that found in the later text of Lucian’s *On the Hall*.⁵⁴

Lucian’s text probably served as a *prolalia*, or introduction, to a longer speech, identifying oratory as the proper response to the visual beauty of the room in which the speech takes place.⁵⁵ Yet it also serves as a meditation upon the power of images and the ways an educated man ought to respond to them. While the first speaker confidently asserts that the proper response to visual beauty for an educated man is to ‘make a return to the sight in speech’, a later speaker interjects to point out the perils of this enterprise. Visual beauty can overwhelm and intimidate the speaker; it also captivates his audience, distracting them with its visuality and turning them into ‘viewers rather than listeners’ (*anti akroatōn theatai kathistantai*).⁵⁶ Indeed, he declares that the audience has itself yielded to this temptation, and has already turned to examine the ceiling and wonder at the paintings on the walls.⁵⁷ This distracted audience exactly parallels Encolpius’ distraction by the painting of Troy. Like Eumolpus, the speaker in *On the Hall*, too, attempts to win back his audience’s attention by acting as their exegete. The paintings demand ‘educated viewers’ (*pepaideumenōn theatōn*), he claims, and he states that he will do his best to ‘paint these things [the paintings] for you in words’.⁵⁸

Lucian’s text articulates the problems inherent in talking about art. While the first speaker declares that the educated viewer must voice his response to images, while only the layman would remain silent, the second suggests that art has the power to make words impotent, distracting an audience with its visual attractions. Yet he too attempts to counter this through words. Both speakers argue for the need for an educated viewer (*pepaideumenos*) and present themselves as filling that gap. The uneducated, in contrast, are condemned simply to look about in wonder and silence – in much the way that the audience itself is later characterised.⁵⁹ Yet this self-portrayal of the orator as the only true exegete of art is also

⁵⁴ See, however, Rimell 2002: 65–6 n. 12 for comparisons with poetic ecphrasis in other Latin authors.

⁵⁵ Lucian, *On the Hall* 1, 3. For discussions see Maffei 1994: xxxviii–xliii; Goldhill 2001b: 160–7; Newby 2002b; Thomas 2007: 229–35. On Lucian’s *prolaliae* see Nesselrath 1990, though at 115 n. 9 he doubts whether this text should be characterised thus.

⁵⁶ *On the Hall* 17–18. ⁵⁷ *On the Hall* 21. ⁵⁸ *On the Hall* 21.

⁵⁹ Lucian, *On the Hall* 2, 21. On *thauma* as a response of the uneducated viewer in Lucian and Philostratus see Newby 2002b: 128–9 and 2009: 326–7 on *Imagines* 1.1.1. See, however, Goldhill 2007: 4–5, 19 for the idea that ecphrasis too aims to amaze its audience.

undermined not only by the second speaker's comments, but even by the first speaker's comparison of himself to Alexander. He compares his desire to speak in the hall to Alexander's ultimately fatal desire to dive into the River Cydnus after seeing its beauty, a rather ominous comparison which itself suggests that this might not be such a good idea.⁶⁰ Alexander's plunge can be read as the ultimate example of total immersion in visual beauty, an immersion that is very different from the orator's attempts to respond to the power of the visual through rhetorical speech. While claiming Alexander as a model, then, the orator also points out a rather different mode of engagement with the visual, that of total immersion and subjugation to an image which bears a closer resemblance to, for example, Narcissus' entrapment by a deceptive image than to the speaker's own proclaimed project.⁶¹ This tension between immersion in the world of the image and an intellectualised, rhetorical viewing is a feature that we also find later in the Elder Philostratus' *Imagines*.

This work dates to the early third century AD and presents itself as the addresses made by a successful sophist concerning the paintings on display in his host's villa on the Bay of Naples.⁶² The work is presented in the proem both as a response to the desire of a group of youths to hear this sophist speak and, more particularly, as a guide to the host's young son on how to interpret paintings.⁶³ The body of the work consists of the descriptions and interpretations of sixty-five individual paintings, the majority on mythological themes with a smattering of landscapes and genre pieces among them.

Much of the earlier literature on this text revolved around the question of whether or not Philostratus was describing a real collection of paintings.⁶⁴ The answer given by many modern scholars would be that this does not really matter. Philostratus' text thematises the relationship between words and images.⁶⁵ Through the questions the work poses, and the strategies and

⁶⁰ *On the Hall* 1.

⁶¹ At *On the Hall* 3 the hall is equated with Echo, putting the speaker whose words she echoes again in the place of Narcissus; see Newby 2002b: 127–8.

⁶² On the rhetorical nature of the text see especially Webb 2006; for an account integrating the rhetorical and pictorial aspects of the text see Primavesi and Giuliani 2012. Other useful discussions include Blanchard 1986; Conan 1987; Beall 1993; Elsner 1995: 21–3; Boeder 1996: 137–70; Costantini, Graziani and Rolet 2006; Giuliani 2007; Baumann 2011; and Squire 2013a. For the impact of the text on later literature see Ballestra-Puech, Bonhomme and Marty 2010.

⁶³ *Imagines* proem 4–5. For discussions see Maffei 1991 and Primavesi and Giuliani 2012.

⁶⁴ As argued most forcefully by Lehmann-Hartleben 1941, critiqued by Bryson 1994. See further below.

⁶⁵ This is encapsulated in particular through the use of the ambiguous verb *graphein*, which can mean both 'to write' and 'to paint': Giuliani 2007: 4–405; Squire 2013a: esp. 106–7.

approaches the narrator employs in describing this collection of paintings, it gives us an insight into ancient discourses of viewing. As Jaś Elsner puts it:

What one could learn from Philostratus was how cultured people looked at paintings. The *Imagines* are strategies of how to view; they are, in effect, a (culturally acceptable) ideology of viewing.⁶⁶

Philostratus presents himself in this work as teaching the young how to respond to paintings. For him, as for the speaker in Lucian's *On the Hall*, a proper response to visual images is to make them the subject of a rhetorical display. Yet within his accounts we can discern a number of different strategies employed. In particular, as I have argued elsewhere, we can discern a dual approach in his attitudes to the paintings, with Philostratus himself often veering between the poles of literate erudition and utter absorption.⁶⁷ Thus, in the first ecphrasis, Scamander, Philostratus seeks to constrain the power of the visual by advising his pupil to look away from the image in whose visual effects he is absorbed, and turn instead to the text on which it is based, Homer's *Iliad*.⁶⁸ The boy's wonder (*thauma*) at a visual effect is here corrected by a reference to literature; in a situation comparable to that in *On the Hall*, the uneducated boy is lost in the visual effects of a painting (the representation of fire in water) while the *pepaideumenos*, the sophist who will teach him how to interpret paintings, tells him instead to look for the origin of the scene in Homer. In fact, the situation is more complicated, because the painting ends up having relatively little to do with the *Iliad*.⁶⁹ However, the model it sets up of an uneducated viewer lost in the painting, and an educated exegete who turns instead to a text, is a close echo not only of the dichotomy between the educated and uneducated viewer in *On the Hall*, but also of the end of Petronius' scene in the art gallery, where Eumolpus seeks to win back his audience, Encolpius, from the lures of an image by giving an overblown and intensely literary poetic rendering of it.

Yet at other times Philostratus himself can be the absorbed viewer, lost in the enticements of a painting. He often plays upon the *topos* of the deceptions of naturalism to elide the distinctions between his own world and that of the painting, expressing himself unable to tell if a bee which had landed on the flowers in 1.23.2 is real or painted, and elsewhere

⁶⁶ Elsner 1995: 29; see also Squire 2009: 340–2.

⁶⁷ For further analysis and bibliography see Newby 2009.

⁶⁸ *Imagines* 1.1.1. See also Squire 2013a: 108–10. ⁶⁹ See Blanchard 1986; Newby 2009: 326–8.

urging his audience to join with him in catching Menoiceus' blood (1.4.4) or listening to the song of a chorus of maidens (2.1.2–3).⁷⁰ This is all part of the rhetorical nature of his descriptions as ecphraseis, defined in the first-century AD rhetorical handbook of Theon thus:

Ecphrasis is a descriptive speech which vividly brings the subject shown before the eyes . . . The virtues of ecphrasis are the following: above all clarity and the vividness (*enargeia*) which makes one almost see what is being spoken about.⁷¹

The aim of this vividness is to take the listener back to the original situation in its entirety, evoking the same sorts of emotions in the audience as might have been experienced by an original bystander, including the senses of sound and smell as well as sight.⁷²

Yet Philostratus' entrance into the world of the image goes beyond that of the virtuoso rhetor. In a number of places he suggests that he himself might fall prey to the paralysing seductions of the image. This is clearest in his narrative of Narcissus, the archetypal absorbed viewer whose deception by a naturalistic image (his reflection in a pool) ultimately leads to his death, and serves as a potent warning to external viewers of the perils of viewing naturalistic images.⁷³ Philostratus closely aligns himself with Narcissus: like him he is enticed by the deceptions of the image, shown by his inability to tell if a bee is painted or real, and, indeed, he immerses himself into the very world of the painting with his direct address to Narcissus.⁷⁴

Elsewhere, too, viewers within the paintings offer a parallel to the viewers outside, suggesting that they might be prey to the same temptations and desires. Thus in the *Hunters* painting, another tour de force of ecphrastic elision between the painted world and reality, Philostratus directly addresses the painted figures and speculates that in reality they are hunting not a boar, but the beautiful youth who stands in the middle of the pool.⁷⁵ Philostratus extricates himself from the painted surface, with a detailed description of the painting, but at the end he returns again to the hunters, depicting them standing on the edge of the pool, astounded (*ekpeplēgasi*) and looking at the youth as if he were a picture (*hoion*

⁷⁰ Bryson 1994: 266–7; Elsner 1995: 32–9.

⁷¹ Theon, *Progymnasmata* 2.118–19, trans. Webb 2009: 197–8. For a discussion of ancient ecphrasis as a rhetorical category see especially Webb 2009; also Bartsch 1989: 6–31 and Goldhill 2007.

⁷² Bartsch 1989: 17–19; Webb 2006: 8–11; 2009: 19–28. Cf. Giuliani 2007: 402 re Philostratus.

⁷³ For viewings of the Narcissus myth see Elsner 1996.

⁷⁴ *Imagines* 1.23.3; Newby 2009: 334. ⁷⁵ *Imagines* 1.28.1.

graphen).⁷⁶ This explicit identification of the youths as viewers of a painting within the painting links them to Philostratus himself and his group of youths, raising the spectre that their stupefied, entranced gazing at a beautiful youth is a temptation to which the viewers outside the painting might also succumb. We can compare this with Philostratus' own reaction to the sight of Rhodogoune's lips in 2.5.5. Having described her posture and hair Philostratus stops at her lips; these are 'most pleasurable to kiss, but not easy to report'. Instead, he tells the boy, 'what you need to learn, you can see'.⁷⁷

While these three texts play with the discourse of viewing in different and often complex ways, they reveal a number of common themes. Encolpius' subjective viewing of the loves of the gods as a reflection of his own erotic misadventures has parallels with the much more sophisticated way in which Philostratus too often seems distracted from his exegetic pose by the erotic attractions of figures within a painting, suggesting a particular vulnerability based on his own desires. The power of art to captivate the viewer is seen as something which can either stun or astound the uneducated (Philostratus' pupil, and Encolpius' absorption in the Fall of Troy) but can be countered by an educated exegete. In some cases, however, even the expert is occasionally stunned by an image, and left lost for words. This immersive viewing seems particularly characteristic of the erotic paintings, which entice their viewers to take them for the real thing, and to linger in a voyeuristic appreciation of the subject's beauty. We have already seen how an engaged emotional response was invited by the erotic naturalism of the sculptures of the wounded Niobids in the *horti*.⁷⁸ Pompeian paintings too are especially dominated by erotic scenes, particularly in the Fourth Style where many of the figures are represented in a sensual nudity that could invite a voyeuristic response.⁷⁹

These texts thus identify a range of responses to art from mute captivation by an image through a range of subjective and intellectualised responses. These might seek to explain away the power of the image, as Philostratus sometimes does, by referring to a text or explaining the techniques behind a particular visual effect, but they can also indulge in it, entering into the picture world, though often in a particularly erudite way. They suggest a number of strategies for engaging with art that are applicable also to the mythological images found in Roman homes. As we have

⁷⁶ *Imagines* 1.28.8. ⁷⁷ Newby 2009: 335. ⁷⁸ Above, p. 131.

⁷⁹ Hodske 2007: 44. For a breakdown of themes see Hodske 2007: 33–57 and CD-Rom, table 3.

Lorenz 2008: 32 states that 70 per cent of the paintings deal with love.

already seen, one response was to yield to the fantasy offered, entering imaginatively into the delights or dangers it presented, while another was to use the image to reflect on one's own situation, as Encolpius does. A third approach was to use the images as an opportunity to reveal one's own erudition, as a springboard for a virtuoso rhetorical display, as both Eumolpus and Philostratus do in their very different ways.

Images could be viewed individually, but they might also be seen as ensembles, part of a series of related images.⁸⁰ This can be seen in Encolpius' interpretation of three paintings as illustrations of unhappy love affairs, as well as in the description of the paintings at the end of *On the Hall*, presented as the second orator's attempt to win back his audience. From his statement that the paintings decorating the room require cultivated viewers (*pepaideumenōn theatōn*) we might have expected lengthy treatments of the art-historical credentials of the paintings, or their relationship with literary texts, such as those given by Philostratus. Yet the speaker concentrates instead on seeing them as a series. While some are treated in a little more detail (such as the first two paintings described), others are reduced to a brief identification of their subject matter and an indication of how they link with others in the room. The speaker moves around the room in an anticlockwise direction, identifying the paintings and pointing out the links between them. Overall the eight paintings seem to be an eclectic bunch, but as the speaker moves along the series he is keen to point out various connections between them (fig. 3.1).

Both the first and the fourth paintings represent scenes associated with Perseus; first his rescue of Andromeda as he swoops down to kill the sea-monster threatening her, then, in the later painting, his earlier feat of killing Medusa, with the aid of Athena. This goddess also dominates the far end of the room. In the back wall is a shrine with a marble statue of Athena, flanked on either side by the painting of Athena and Perseus and a representation of Hephaestus' erotic pursuit of the goddess. The last two paintings show Odysseus giving up his pretence of madness when his son is threatened and, in contrast, Medea holding a sword and contemplating the murder of her sons.

Through verbal links such as 'another Athena' or 'another ancient painting', Lucian makes clear the links between the paintings, even when some seem more tenuous than others. The group of two paintings and a statue at the far end of the wall sets up a mini-shrine to the goddess Athena, with its statue flanked by two representations of her deeds in a pattern that might

⁸⁰ For further discussion of the texts below see Newby 2002a.

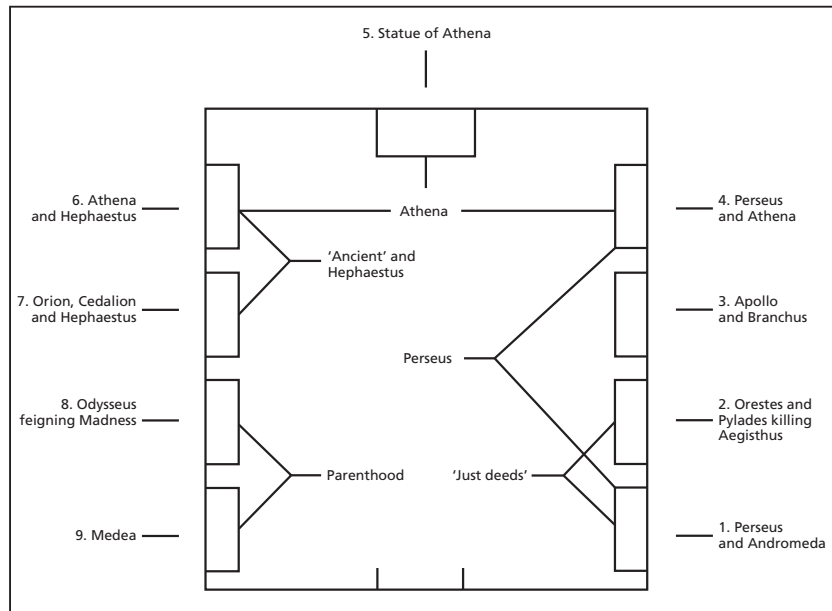


Figure 3.1 Reconstruction of the layout of the paintings described in Lucian's *On the Hall*, indicating the connections Lucian draws between them.

evoke that of a public temple.⁸¹ The two paintings of Perseus have a narrative link showing his two major heroic achievements. Other paintings are introduced with more tenuous connections. The painting which follows that of Hephaestus and Athena shows Orion. Initially this is described simply as 'another ancient painting', though at the end the speaker mentions that Hephaestus is shown watching the scene from Lemnos, thus linking it to the previous image where the god was shown in erotic pursuit. Once we have been introduced to these connections between the paintings it is not hard to see more, such as the theme of the Trojan War, different sorts of erotic adventures, or contrasting images of parenthood. As Lucian ends his speech by pointing out how distracting such images can be, his imagined audience may well have already deserted him, looking around the room to discover new connections for themselves.⁸²

On the surface, Philostratus' *Imagines* presents us with a rather different approach to the paintings which the orator encounters. These are described in depth, though the ecphraseis often move from the details

⁸¹ See e.g. the deeds of Apollo (Niobids and Gauls) on the doors of his temple on the Palatine: Propertius 2.31.12–14 and [Chapter 1](#), above.

⁸² For some suggestions see Newby 2002a: 119–25.

actually depicted to broader descriptions of the stories behind the image, or enter into the scene portrayed to such an extent that the viewer seems able to hear and smell the scene around him, as well as just to see it.⁸³ Yet within this sophisticated, rhetorical text, Philostratus also seems to reveal an awareness that mythological images could be arranged into programmes as well as appreciated for their individual merits. As early as the poet Goethe, it was noted that the paintings Philostratus describes can actually be grouped into different sorts of images, such as heroic and tragic subjects, erotic subjects, a cycle concerning the hero Heracles and landscape scenes.⁸⁴

In 1941 Lehmann-Hartleben drew on this observation to construct an imagined account of the real gallery which he supposed that Philostratus was describing.⁸⁵ Through a detailed reading of the individual ecphraseis he posited a series of rooms in which a dominant theme was represented in the main body of the wall, with other mythological paintings appearing above, perhaps in the frieze zone.⁸⁶ When Philostratus describes paintings that seem to be linked in theme or tone, but are separated across his text, Lehmann-Hartleben suggested that this was a result of his describing real paintings, but in the wrong order; for example by describing paintings from above to below when the real connections between the paintings went in a horizontal direction.⁸⁷ Elsewhere, on the rare occasion where Philostratus does describe a sequence of six paintings that are all related to the hero Heracles, but does not give them in chronological order, Lehmann-Hartleben suggests that he entered the room, and thus the cycle, by the wrong door, coming into the middle of the narrative cycle rather than its beginning.⁸⁸

Lehmann-Hartleben's desire to see in Philostratus' text a description of a real third-century villa collection has been challenged by later scholars, who argue that the text is a rhetorical construction.⁸⁹ Norman Bryson, in particular, has pointed out that Lehmann-Hartleben's argument relies upon the assumption that Philostratus did not understand what he was viewing, an argument that is undermined by the sophistication of the

⁸³ See Giuliani 2007.

⁸⁴ Goethe's list is usefully reproduced in the introduction of the Loeb edition of Philostratus' *Imagines* (trans. A. Fairbanks, Loeb Classical Library 256, 1979: xxvii–xxxii).

⁸⁵ Lehmann-Hartleben 1941.

⁸⁶ He identifies five main rooms, a Room of Heracles, a Room of the Primitive World, a Room of Aphrodite, a Room of Dionysus and a Room of Rivers.

⁸⁷ Lehmann-Hartleben 1941: 20. ⁸⁸ *Imagines* 2.20–5; Lehmann-Hartleben 1941: 22–3.

⁸⁹ Blanchard 1986; Boeder 1996: 138–48.

text as a whole.⁹⁰ Yet Lehmann-Hartleben was correct to notice that there are unifying themes within the paintings that Philostratus describes, and that some groups of paintings (1.20–3 and 2.20–5) do present sufficient parallels in either form or content to encourage us to link them together. Rather than seeing this as evidence of Philostratus' failure to understand a real collection, however, I would argue that this adds a further layer to his text, and that Philostratus fully intended these links to be noted by his audience.⁹¹

Taken separately, the ecphraseis concentrate on how to view individual images, ranging in their approach from detached intellectual viewings which point out details of technique, or expound on the literary source behind a particular myth, to emotional absorption in the realism of the image, seeking to enter the picture frame and communicate with the figures within.⁹² Yet if we look at the descriptions as a whole, Philostratus does indeed seem to have built in groups of images that could be read as programmes, linked on either thematic or formal grounds. The two sets of *Imagines* at 1.20–3 and 2.20–5 are the clearest indication of this, but once we have recognised the potential to discern programmes between the individual images, it is not hard to find more, displaced across the entirety of the text.

The group of images described at 1.20–3 are linked by their compositional details. These four images include two paintings of sleeping figures, Olympus and Silenus, and two of youths gazing into their reflections in pools, Olympus again and Narcissus, arranged in the pattern ABAB.⁹³ The compositional links are highlighted by the verbal descriptions. 1.20 opens with an identification of the scene of springs and a cave as Celaenae before moving onto the figure of Olympus, who is described as sleeping after he has been playing the flute, lying among the flowers while a group of satyrs look on at him amorously.

In 1.21 we seem to move back in time slightly. Now Olympus is directly addressed: 'For whom do you play the flute, Olympus?' This time he stands in an isolated spot, leaning over a rock to look down into the pool. The references to rocks and pool link the scene to the landscape of the previous image, but also to the painting of Narcissus that will soon

⁹⁰ Bryson 1994: esp. 262, 275.

⁹¹ The discussion below draws on Newby 2002a: 124–30. For further discussion of the *Imagines* as an ensemble see Baumann 2011: esp. 91–164, and earlier treatments by Boeder 1996: 138–48; Blanchard 1986; and Braginskaya and Leonov 2006.

⁹² Newby 2009.

⁹³ The pairing of the images of Narcissus and Olympus is also discussed by Baumann 2011: 1–9.

follow. In between, however, in 1.22 we start with the words, ‘the satyr is sleeping’, *katheudei ho satyros*. The reference to sleep immediately links the description with 1.20, but here we are told that this satyr is one captured by drink by Midas, who sits nearby. Also nearby is a group of dancing nymphs. The compositions of 1.20 and 1.22 link them together as scenes of sleeping figures, but the tone of the two is also contrasted: Olympus lies tired out by flute-playing, allowing his admirers to gaze on him without restraint, while the satyr in 1.22 lies in a drunken sleep, dribbling back wine into the spring beside him, and an object of fun to the nymphs who mock him.

The final image in the group, 1.23, shows the figure of Narcissus, gazing at his reflection in a pool. The reference to a cave dedicated to the nymphs situates the myth in the same rustic idyll as the previous three images, and especially to 1.20 where Olympus lies in a landscape of caves and springs, and 1.21 where Olympus himself looks into a pool to see himself piping. Narcissus’ desiring gaze links with that of the satyrs in 1.20, while his inability to realise that he is looking at himself lends a darker tone to the image than is present in the paintings of Olympus. The similarities between the paintings prompt the reader to think also about the contrasts.⁹⁴ As we will see later, this is also true of real collections of images, where compositional parallels encourage viewers to consider the parallels and contrasts between the situations in which the figures find themselves.⁹⁵

The second group of images occurs in the second book, 2.20–5. These six images all feature the hero Heracles: 2.20–2 are all set in Africa and show Heracles with Atlas, wrestling with Antaeus and then asleep being attacked by pygmies; 2.20–1 concentrate on Heracles’ strength as he offers to exchange places with Atlas, and as he wrestles with Antaeus; 2.22 offers a humorous contrast to these, showing Heracles asleep after the contest with Antaeus (whose corpse is also shown in the painting) and approached by a hoard of attacking pygmies.⁹⁶ The three paintings are clearly linked as sequential moments in a continuous narrative. In the wrestling match Heracles already has the Apples of the Hesperides, which he obtained as a consequence of his meeting with Atlas, shown in 2.20, while in 2.22 the corpse of the defeated Antaeus is shown next to the sleeping hero.

⁹⁴ On the way Philostratus uses formal clues to control viewing of the paintings; see Beall 1993: 353–6.

⁹⁵ See especially Lorenz 2008: 261–328.

⁹⁶ At 2.22.4 Heracles is described as waking up and sweeping up the hostile forces in his lion skin, but whether this is supposed to be shown in the painting or taken as Philostratus continuing the narrative is unclear.

The other three paintings also continue the theme of Heracles' life and deeds, but are less closely united in time. Two show Heracles' less admirable side. In 2.23 he is shown slaughtering his family when driven mad. The painting is described as showing Heracles in a frenzy while a crowd of servants tries to restrain him. Some of his sons already lie dead on an altar, struck by Heracles' arrows, while his wife, Megara, and his remaining child also appear in the ransacked room. The following painting shows Heracles' theft and cooking of an ox taken from Theiodamas, who stands nearby cursing him. The final painting, 2.25, shows one of Heracles' canonical labours, his defeat of the Horses of Diomedes and commemoration of the youth Abderus who had been slaughtered by them. As Lehmann-Hartleben saw, we have here a programme of the two sides of Heracles' character, focussing both on his heroic achievements and on his potential for brutality.⁹⁷ There is less sense of compositional links here, but the paintings are bound together by their presentation of one hero in a variety of different events and representations. Unified thematic programmes such as this are actually relatively rare in Pompeii. One exception is the Fourth-Style frieze from the House of Octavius Quartio (Pompeii II. 2, 2), which shows a number of scenes from the Life of Heracles; another example is the *ala* in the House of the Menander (Pompeii I. 10, 4), which is decorated with three separate scenes from the Fall of Troy.⁹⁸

More often found in Pompeii is the use of compositional and thematic links to bind paintings across a room, or even across different rooms of a house. This can also be seen in Philostratus' text, and was a key feature that led Lehmann-Hartleben to see the text as the description of a real, albeit misunderstood, collection. A number of paintings deal with the theme of the Seven against Thebes. On the Theban side, the self-sacrifice of Menoiceus in front of the walls of Thebes is the subject of 1.4. Three other paintings deal with the fates of some of the seven attackers. In 1.27 Amphiaraus' descent into the ground after the ill-fated mission against Thebes is shown, while 2.29 and 2.30 show the funerals of two of the heroes. In 2.29 Antigone is shown on the battlefield in front of the city walls preparing to bury her brother, Polynices, by the tomb of his brother and rival, Eteocles. In 2.30 a scene of female devotion is also shown, here that of a wife for her husband as Evadne leaps upon the pyre of her husband Capaneus, who had also met his death at Thebes. Both thematic and compositional links bind together some of the paintings. Both 1.4 and 2.29 show the deaths or burial of heroes beneath the walls of a city, a

⁹⁷ Lehmann-Hartleben 1941: 21–4.

⁹⁸ PPM 3: 82–98; PPM 2: 276–85.

theme that is continued in 1.7 where the death of Memnon in front of the walls of Troy is shown.

Elsewhere compositional similarities can link together different myths. Three paintings depict brutal deaths involving chariots. In 2.4 the focus is on the destruction of Hippolytus' chariot when his horses panic at the sight of a bull from the sea, the result of his father Theseus' curse upon him after he has been wrongly accused of rape by his stepmother Phaedra. In 1.11 another youth is shown tumbling from the chariot, but this time it is Phaethon who had rashly attempted to drive the chariot of the sun. In 1.17 the aftermath of the contest between Oinomaus and Pelops is shown. Oinomaus' chariot lies shattered, his body beside it, while Pelops rides on in victory. All three paintings show scenes of destruction, with horses in disarray and the body of the hapless hero thrown to the ground. Here there is no obvious thematic connection, but the paintings are rather linked together through their compositional similarities. Recognition of this link might also prompt one to contrast the fates of these men, one unjustly punished for his rejection of his stepmother, another who brings his fate upon himself by his youthful rashness, and the third a victim of the treachery of his own charioteer. All can be seen as victims, yet all are also in part culpable – Phaethon for his arrogance, Oinomaus for trying to prevent the marriage of his daughter and Hippolytus for his hubristic rejection of the goddess Aphrodite, at least as he was famously presented in Euripides' play on the subject.⁹⁹

While Philostratus' text does not explicitly draw us towards the connections between the various paintings in the way that Lucian had, the existence of two closely related groups of images linked first by composition and then by theme at 1.20–3 and 2.20–5 suggests a certain consciousness that this was another way to interpret pictorial collections. On repeated reading this could lead the reader to look for other connections across the text, based on both compositional and thematic parallels.

These links agree closely with the experience of viewing we can discern in Pompeian houses. In the [next chapter](#) I will look at a number of domestic decorative ensembles in the light of the viewing strategies revealed in our texts, to see what options were available for the viewer. One thing the texts stress is the potential for different reactions to painted images. Particular details of an image might encourage a particular sort of viewing, but the misappropriations of Encolpius, and the variety of thematic programmes suggested in Lucian's account, also reveal the possibility that viewers could

⁹⁹ Euripides, *Hippolytus* 1–23.

impose their own interpretations onto the images, even if they may not easily have fit.¹⁰⁰

Myth as *exemplum*

Lucian's *On the Hall* and Philostratus' *Imagines* are both rhetorical texts, using visual images as a means to elevate their own self-representation as sophisticated viewers, and as a tool in the proof of their rhetorical arguments. Before I move onto some actual examples of mythological ensembles I want to say a little more about how this rhetorical use of images had wider resonances within the context of the Roman house. I have shown above how texts about viewing illuminate some of the different possible reactions available for the viewers of art. Rather than suggesting that images invite one normative reading, these suggest the potential for a multiplicity of readings of images, depending on the proclivities of their ancient viewers. A similar conclusion is reached by Bettina Bergmann in her meticulous recreation of the viewing experience in the House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii, which is discussed further in [Chapter 4](#).¹⁰¹ Bergmann relates the experience of viewing the decoration of the house to the strictures found in rhetorical texts about training memory. Just as the orator is encouraged to memorise his text by imaginatively placing different elements of it around a house, the viewer of mythological panels draws on his own memories to give meaning to the images he sees and to weave them into a particular narrative. The use of formal and thematic links between separate images also helps to bind them together and correspond to the rhetorical principles of *similitudo*, *vicinitas* and *contrarium*.¹⁰² In an extension of Bergmann's analogy, I will argue that we can also see these rooms as storehouses of rhetorical *exempla*, ready to be selected by the viewer as supporting evidence for his or her own rhetorical arguments.

We have already seen how *pinacothecae* invite rhetorical display, and that this can be found as much in a private house as in a public gallery. At a practical level, much of the education of Roman youths took place within the home, with elite families appointing Greek tutors to educate their

¹⁰⁰ Lorenz 2008: 10–13 rightly cautions against scholars imposing programmatic viewings which rely on texts and suggest that we need to look carefully at the images, but Petronius' representation of Encolpius suggests that viewings skewed by a personal agenda were also conceivable in antiquity.

¹⁰¹ Bergmann 1994. ¹⁰² Bergmann 1994: esp. 246; cf. Brilliant 1984: 69–71.

sons as well as sending them further afield to complete their education.¹⁰³ The themes of Roman declamatory rhetoric, such as Seneca's *Suasoriae* and *Controversiae*, often cluster around familial themes and seem to have served as training exercises. All this reveals the key role that rhetoric played within Roman education and the fact that much of this education took place in the house. At the same time, the advice given by Cicero, the *Ad Herennium* and Quintilian to train one's memory by associating ideas with different spaces of the house shows the role that architecture and decoration could play in rhetorical education and the importance of seeing decoration within this wider rhetorical context.¹⁰⁴

In the Tiberian period, Valerius Maximus' collection of *Memorable Doings and Sayings* is explicitly presented as a compilation of useful examples for others to draw on.¹⁰⁵ It had a practical use for budding rhetoricians, but also a moral purpose, as a collection of examples to either emulate or avoid.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, it has also been argued that rhetorical declamation itself could play a didactic role. Thus Mary Beard notes the recurrence of particular fictional scenarios in declamations and argues that they can be seen as a form of cultural myth-making. With their focus on issues such as family, legitimacy and inheritance, she sees them as playing an important role in constructing and interrogating the social rules of Roman society.¹⁰⁷ Valerius is keen to offer his readers Roman examples, often drawn from history, but does also draw on the histories and myths of other cultures, including Greece. Indeed at one point he specifically identifies the didactic potential of a Greek mythological image.

Commenting on external examples of piety towards one's parents he adduces the example of Perus who suckled her father Mycon when he was close to death, and says that viewers are amazed when they see this in paintings and recall the long-gone event.¹⁰⁸ Just such a painting is in fact displayed in a room off the atrium of the House of Lucretius Fronto in Pompeii (V. 4, a, room g), along with a poetic response to the image, commenting on the scene and concluding, 'Sad shame along with piety

¹⁰³ Lucian, *On Salaried Posts in Great Houses* parodies this Roman predilection for foreign tutors. See E. Rawson 1985: 66–83.

¹⁰⁴ *Ad Herennium* 3.16–24; Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.86.351–4; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratorio* 11.2.17–22; Bergmann 1994: 225.

¹⁰⁵ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, preface.

¹⁰⁶ Bloomer 1992; Skidmore 1996; Langlands 2008, 2011.

¹⁰⁷ Beard 1993. See also Imber 2008 for another analysis of declamation as socialisation.

¹⁰⁸ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 5.4 (ext) 1.

is shown in it'.¹⁰⁹ Together, Valerius Maximus' text and the Pompeian painting show the potential for mythological images to play a didactic role, and also to serve as examples that could be deployed in a rhetorical argument.

For a viewer intent on rhetorical display, either to show their own *paideia* or to illustrate a particular moral argument, the images on domestic walls could act as the visual equivalent of compilations such as that of Valerius Maximus. Sometimes they seem to offer a variety of illustrations of a particular theme, whereas at other times the selection is more eclectic, allowing them to support a variety of different arguments or interpretations. It is also possible for viewers to be selective, as we see in Petronius' gallery, where many of the paintings are passed over in silence. By seeing mythological paintings as a storehouse of rhetorical *exempla* we can also draw attention to the constant recreation of their meaning over repeated viewings. While the patron who commissioned a set of paintings may have had particular associations in mind, repeated viewings by himself and others allowed for other meanings and debates to arise.

The house was an important place for both the formation and the representation of values and identities in the Roman world. In Republican thought the ancestor masks displayed in the atria of elite houses are said to have played a positive role in the formation of young men, urging them on to emulate the great deeds of their forefathers.¹¹⁰ In the mid-first century AD Pliny the Elder harks back to this tradition, painting a nostalgic picture of the good old days when ancestral busts and family trees decorated atria and tablina, instead of the portraits of foreigners prized by his contemporaries.¹¹¹ The idea that the house should be a place where the memory of the past spurs on the present generation to great deeds still has resonance for Pliny, even if he depicts the tradition as fading away.

These texts suggest that the house and its decoration could serve a didactic function, helping to shape the values of those who frequented the

¹⁰⁹ Clarke 2003: 257–8 and fig. 151 gives the full text and translation; here the names are given as Pero and Micon. See also Wallace-Hadrill 2013: 607. Another representation of the myth can be seen in Naples, Museo Nazionale inv. 9040, also from Pompeii, there without any inscription. In a paper given at the British School at Rome, May 2014, Peter Knox argues that the epigram may be an excerpt from a longer elegiac poem rather than composed to accompany the image (to be published in a forthcoming volume edited by I. Fielding).

¹¹⁰ Sallust, *Jugurthine War* 4.5–6; cf. also Polybius 6.52 on funerals. Both are discussed further in the Epilogue.

¹¹¹ Pliny, *Natural History* 35.4–8. For a discussion of the link between portraits and memory here see Carey 2003: 141–56.

space. At the same time rhetoric also played an important role in debating and constructing social identities, and *exempla* were used as a means by which to assert particular arguments.¹¹² When we put these two aspects of ancient education together, it seems clear that the mythological images that dominate the domestic environment could also have served as material for rhetorical debates and constructions of identity, either in the context of education or, more broadly, in the conversations and debates that could be facilitated in the course of other social interactions, such as the *cena* or *salutatio*. By looking at mythological images as a visual thesaurus of *exempla*, we can see how they could play the roles in defining and debating social identities which Muth, Lorenz and others have suggested. Like the thematic collections we find in texts such as Valerius Maximus' *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, or the mythological lists that seem to have been a key feature of mythographic handbooks, separate myths could be put together as examples of *pietas*, erotic adventures or faithful wives, allowing for discussion of the parameters within which social behaviour ought to be conducted. Individually, as we have seen, they might also serve as prompts for an erudite mythological exegesis or as the gateway to fantasy. In the following chapter we will see how this range of responses was invited in a series of case studies from Pompeii and Rome, and the growing importance of mythological *exempla* as a means to reflect on the values of human life.

¹¹² On the social role of rhetoric see especially Beard 1993 and Imber 2008.

4 | Mythological Wall-paintings in the Roman House

In the [last chapter](#) we saw some of the ways that mythological images can be interpreted in literary sources, and their potential to act as agents for *paideia*, emotional engagement and rhetorical display. Now, I will explore how this range of readings was facilitated and invited by Roman wall-paintings. Internal decoration played an essential role in the house's representational function, setting the stage for the owner's self-display and facilitating the social interactions which took place in the domestic sphere.¹ The images that decorated houses not only reflect the desired self-image of the owner of the house, but also cast light on the wider norms of society and the frameworks within which values were constructed and debated.²

In this chapter I will look selectively at some examples of the mythological wall-paintings which have been found in Roman houses. The material is extensive, especially from the Campanian cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum which were preserved by the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79.³ Despite the questions raised by using Pompeii as representative of broader Roman tastes (it was, of course, a town with a range of cultural influences, encompassing Oscan, Greek and Samnite cultures as well as those of Rome), the wealth of material it offers simply cannot be ignored.⁴ The general dearth of contemporary material from Rome and Ostia makes it hard to judge how representative of Roman taste the collections in Pompeii might have been. Nevertheless, the fact that similar schemes of wall decoration to those in Pompeii appear in elite villas in Campania and, occasionally, in town houses from Ostia and Rome suggests that there was a common tradition of decorating domestic houses with mythological panels which continued into later centuries and that the same broad

¹ On the house as a place of self-display see Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 6.5; Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.138–9. Modern literature is extensive; see especially Wallace-Hadrill 1988, 1994; Clarke 1991; D'Arms 1999; Hales 2003.

² See especially the approaches of Muth 1998, 1999 and Lorenz 2005, 2008, discussed above, pp. 138–9.

³ For detailed analysis of the Pompeian paintings, see Lorenz 2008.

⁴ On Pompeian identities see Wallace-Hadrill 2011; also Lorenz 2008: 445–52.

range of responses to these would have been available in Pompeii as in Rome. Petronius' description of the wealthy freedman Trimalchio's house, while set in Campania, was probably designed to amuse a cosmopolitan readership in the capital, and satirises the norms of behaviour at Rome as much as those in Campania.⁵ Here I combine readings of a mythological series from a villa at Tor Marancia, outside Rome, and the cycle of paintings that were found in the grounds of the Villa Negroni at Rome with studies of the decoration of a number of Pompeian houses, covering material from the first two centuries AD.⁶

Third-Style Schemes: Epic and Elegy in Two Houses in Pompeii

A number of large-scale mythological paintings are preserved from the Third Style of decoration. These tend to show grand themes taken from epic or tragic cycles, and often depicted in an imposing architectural framework. Here we will look at two collections of Third-Style images which have some overlaps in their choice of themes but were arranged rather differently in the two houses they decorated.⁷ The Third-Style paintings from the large and impressive House of the Gilded Cupids come from the area of the house which is usually seen in literary sources as the most publicly accessible, high-status area of the house, open to all, the atrium and tablinum, as well as from a nearby exedra.⁸ This house had a multitude of lavishly decorated rooms (mostly painted in the Fourth Style), including one decorated with the gilded glass medallions after which it is named, as well as a peristyle garden filled with Dionysiac imagery.⁹ The Third-Style paintings form just one part of its overall decorative scheme,

⁵ Petronius is usually identified as T. Petronius Niger, Nero's 'arbiter of taste', whose death is described by Tacitus, *Annals* 16.18–19; see Slater 1990: 7–14.

⁶ Ostia has yielded less evidence of complex mythological ensembles; see, however, Clarke 1991: 270–88 and 320–39 on the House of the Muses and the House of Jupiter and Ganymede. Outside Italy the best evidence for later Roman wall-painting comes from Ephesus; see Zimmermann and Ladstätter 2011.

⁷ Three subjects appear in both houses, though in slightly different compositions, leading Richardson 2000: 70–1 to conclude that the artist of the House of Jason also completed the corresponding paintings in the House of the Gilded Cupids. Seiler 1992: 110–11 instead sees the artist of the House of Jason as a copyist of the paintings in the House of the Gilded Cupids.

⁸ For the division of the house into public and private spaces see Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 6.5 with the analysis of Wallace-Hadrill 1994: 3–61, especially his identification of two axes of differentiation – public/private and grand/humble – at 10–12, 38–9.

⁹ Seiler 1992 gives a detailed account of the house; on the sculptural programme see also Jashemski 1979: 338–41.

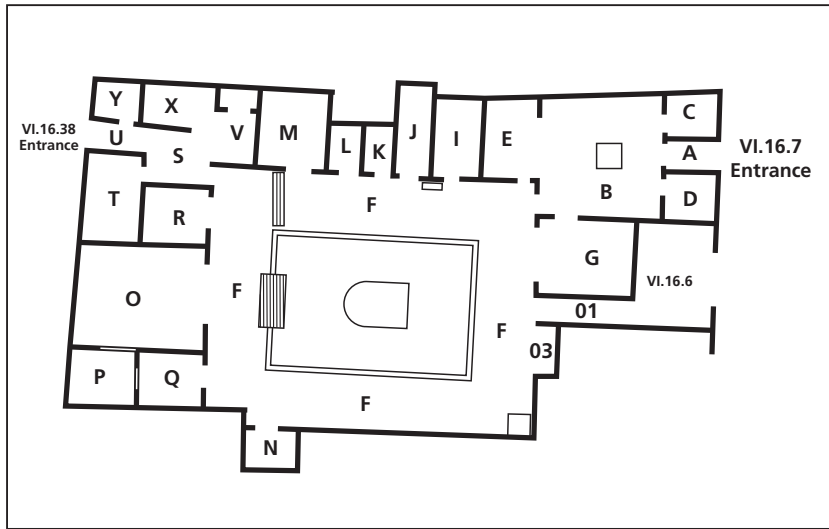


Figure 4.1 Plan of the House of the Gilded Cupids, Pompeii VI. 16, 7.38.

though their importance for the family's self-display is shown not just by their placement in the first area of the house which is entered, but also from their careful restoration after damage probably caused by the AD 62 earthquake. The paintings in the more modest House of Jason instead comprise the main mythological decoration of the house. They decorated a series of rooms off the peristyle. This house lacks a traditional atrium and tablinum and the richest decoration is found in this suite of three rooms. Thus it is likely that as well as receiving the owner's peers as invited guests to dinner, these rooms would also have played a reception role for more lower-ranking visitors, designed to impress both groups with their evidence of the owner's wealth and culture.

Prompting *paideia*: Epic Themes in the House of the Gilded Cupids

The House of the Gilded Cupids (Pompeii VI. 16, 7.38) is a lavishly decorated house whose current layout dates from the first century BC when a number of smaller houses were amalgamated to create one large house with a ground plan of c. 830 m² (fig. 4.1).¹⁰ The rooms around

¹⁰ For detailed accounts see Sogliano 1906: 374–83; Seiler 1992; PPM 5: 714–846 (F. Seiler). Wallace-Hadrill 1994: 215 calls it a '[p]rime example of elegant and beautifully decorated property with multiple commercial dependencies'. Lorenz 2008: 317–20, 416–22 also discusses the mythological paintings.

the atrium are decorated mostly in late Third-Style designs, dated to the AD 30s or 40s, while the rooms off the peristyle at the back of the house were redecorated in the Fourth Style.¹¹ The house suffered some damage, possibly during the AD 62 earthquake, after which the decoration was renewed and the damaged Third-Style paintings repaired.¹² The paintings of the atrium B, room E (tablinum) and room G, an exedra which opens onto the peristyle but is also positioned next to the atrium, all feature large mythological panels, though some were already badly damaged at the time of excavation. These mythological panels are large and multi-figured with a clear sense of narrative, and many seem to be on epic themes. Across these three rooms, which centre on the most publicly accessible area of the house, the atrium, there seems to have been a desire to recreate a form of pictorial display which evoked that of public *pinacothecae* and, through the themes chosen, allowed the host and his guests to show off their *paideia*, while also associating the host himself with the elevating themes of epic.

The paintings of the atrium are badly damaged and only the lower part of each survives. Any interpretations of their content need to be taken cautiously, since the lost parts of the images may well have changed their significance. Nevertheless, the painting on the south wall, adjacent to the doorway into exedra G, clearly portrayed a pastoral scene.¹³ A photograph taken during the excavation shows the remains of a seated figure, with a syrinx at his side and goat and sheep in the foreground.¹⁴ Only his left leg now survives, but this is bare with a high laced boot on the foot (fig. 4.2). The painting from the opposite wall was removed and is now in the stores at Pompeii (fig. 4.3). It shows the lower half of four figures. At the left stands a man in a short chiton next to another man wearing a longer cloak and carrying a stick who is identified by a Greek inscription beneath as *Phoinix*.¹⁵ On the right a male figure is shown seated on the ground, wearing oriental costume and hat, looking towards a seated female figure of whom only a draped leg remains. A shield leans at her side. The inscription labelling one figure as Phoenix suggests that this shows a scene from the Trojan War, and on comparison with a better preserved painting from

¹¹ On dating see Seiler 1992: 97–101. The small room C at the front of the house is also decorated in the Fourth Style.

¹² Restoration to the house may have been carried out in two phases: Seiler 1992: 82–4, 138.

¹³ This wall was repaired after the earthquake and the painting restored. The doorway also seems to date to this time: Seiler 1992: 82.

¹⁴ PPM 5: 724, fig. 17.

¹⁵ Sogliano 1906: 379 records the inscription, only partially visible now. See also Seiler 1992: 25.



Figure 4.2 Existing state of the wall-painting of Paris, in the atrium of the House of the Gilded Cupids, Pompeii.

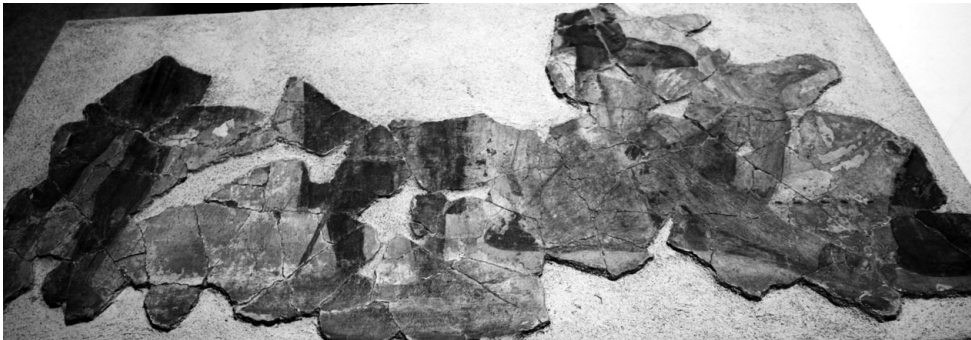


Figure 4.3 Wall-painting of Achilles and Polyxena, from the atrium of the House of the Gilded Cupids. Pompeii Stores inv. 20559.

the House of Jason (pl. 4), it has been suggested that it shows the story of Achilles' love for the Trojan princess, Polyxena.¹⁶

Various versions of the myth are attested, but according to Servius, having fallen in love with the princess on some earlier occasion, Achilles

¹⁶ Seiler 1992: 109–10 with discussion of other interpretations; also *PPM* 5: 725.

came to the Temple of Apollo Thymbraeus outside the walls of Troy to ask for Polyxena's hand in marriage, at which time he was treacherously shot with an arrow by Paris.¹⁷ The scene in the House of Jason (pl. 4, discussed further below) is clearly set in front of a city, fitting the identification as Troy. There, Achilles stands to the far left, next to Phoenix, while the seated female figure would be Polyxena, her maidservant standing behind her. The figure at her feet, looking up at her and wearing oriental dress, is presumably her brother Paris. The image concentrates on the love between Achilles and Polyxena, stressed by the gaze which unites them and the eroticism of Polyxena's languid posture, with arm above her head. The painting in the House of the Gilded Cupids shares the same overall composition, though here the figures are grouped more closely together. It seems likely, then, that it too focussed on the relationship between Achilles and Polyxena. In these two paintings, Paris does not hold his bow or hide behind the statue of Apollo, as in Servius' account, but his presence could certainly have evoked the story of Achilles' death, while the tomb in the foreground of the House of Jason painting might also remind us of the fatal implications of this love for Polyxena, who was later sacrificed to the ghost of Achilles on his tomb as a gesture to his amorous ghost, or, in one version, herself committed suicide at his tomb out of love for him.¹⁸

The pastoral scene from the left of the atrium has been seen as a representation of Paris pasturing his flock on Mount Ida. It is even possible that it showed the scene of the Judgement of Paris.¹⁹ While Fourth-Style representations of the Judgement tend to focus on close-up scenes of the figures of Paris, Hermes and the goddesses, there are other Third-Style scenes where the myth was portrayed in a landscape setting with goats or sheep in the foreground.²⁰ The dress of Paris varies in these depictions; while he is sometimes shown in full Phrygian costume in trousers and Phrygian cap, elsewhere he appears mostly naked except for a cloak, and sometimes wearing boots. Indeed, a Fourth-Style painting from Pompeii V. 2, 15, showing Paris seated with a syrinx at his feet and wearing laced boots, is similar to the remains shown here, though it gives less space to the

¹⁷ Servius, *ad Aen.* 3.321. A similar story is told by Hyginus, *Fabulae* 110. Further on the myth see Brill's *New Pauly* s.v. 'Polyxena'.

¹⁸ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4.16.4.

¹⁹ Sogliano 1906: 376–7; Seiler 1992: 24–5, 109.

²⁰ Dawson 1944: no. 51 (a now lost painting from Pompeii V. 1, 18, triclinium) sounds particularly close in that Paris was represented almost naked and seated to the right, with his flock in the foreground. See also Dawson 1944: nos. 19, 48, 66.

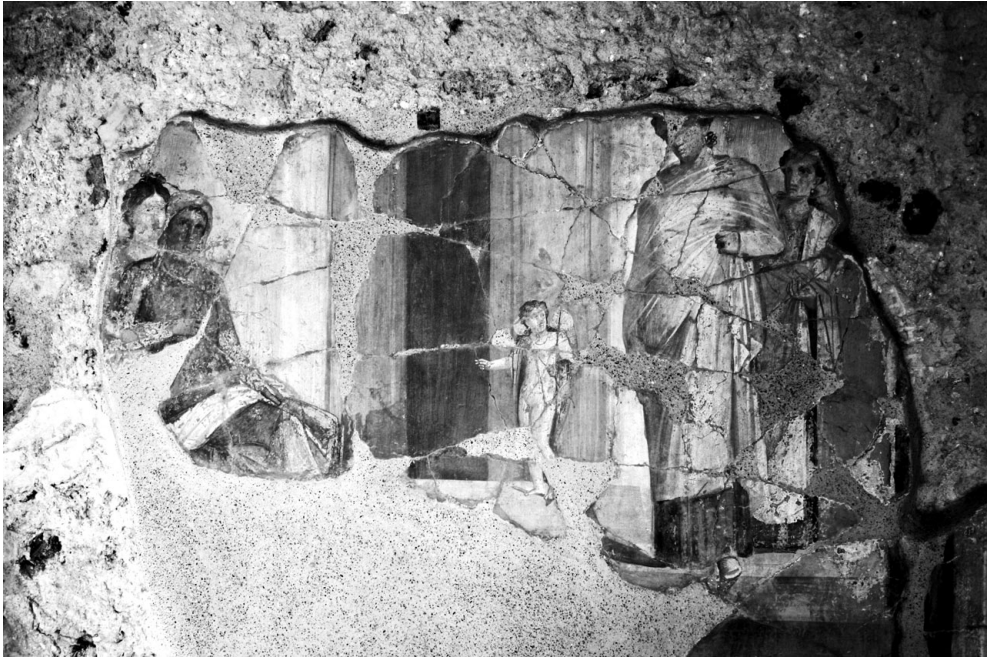


Figure 4.4 Wall-painting of Paris and Helen, tablinum of the House of the Gilded Cupids, Pompeii.

landscape setting.²¹ It seems likely, therefore, that the two opposite images in the atrium paired scenes relating to the Trojan War, both featuring the figure of Paris. The painting in the House of Jason shows the walls of Troy in the background; if replicated here the painting would have contrasted with the bucolic tone of the image opposite, setting the world of the city at war against the pastoral peacefulness of the time before the Judgement of Paris.

The decoration of the tablinum, which lies off the atrium to the west, also featured the figure of Paris. The decoration of the back western wall of the room is still visible in parts, preserving the lower half of the central panel (fig. 4.4). This shows a number of figures either side of an open door. To the left sits a man dressed in trousers and a Phrygian cap, identifying him as Paris. On the right a fully draped woman stands in front of him. Both figures are accompanied by female servants who hover behind them, while between them a small Eros looks towards the women and gestures towards the open door. She looks towards Paris, while he

²¹ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 119691; *PPM* 3: 859, fig. 9.

looks out towards the viewer. The painting represents Paris and Helen, the open door suggesting the critical moment when Helen decides to leave her husband Menelaus in favour of the oriental stranger. This image was centrally placed in the middle of the wall and was visible from the atrium. A viewer standing in the centre of the atrium, after entering, could see an unfolding history of aspects of the Trojan War, tied together through the figure of Paris. To his left was Paris on Mount Ida (fig. 4.2) while straight ahead was shown the moment of Helen's decision to leave her husband for him (fig. 4.4), and finally, to the right, a scene in the middle of the Trojan War, Achilles' love for Paris' sister Polyxena, which will lead ultimately to both his death and hers (fig. 4.3). The tone in all three of these paintings is still, but portentous. In all three the choice of love (Paris' choice of Aphrodite and Helen, Helen's choice of Paris, and Achilles' love for Polyxena) will end in warfare and death, shattering the pastoral calm of Mount Ida.

The painting on the north wall of the tablinum is mostly lost and was already badly damaged at the time of excavation. From the remains that survive it seems to have shown a seated female figure to the left with another figure to the right, of which only a shoe remains. The subject is unclear, though Lorenz suggests that it may have shown Phaedra and Hippolytus.²² Its representation of a seated female figure on the left sets up a compositional parallel to the seated Paris on the neighbouring wall, and another scene of a mythological couple could well have been thought appropriate.

The paintings of the atrium and tablinum seem to share a common theme based around the figure of Paris and the history of the Trojan War. The choice of an unusual theme for the northern wall of the atrium, known in only one other version, may reflect a desire of the patron to showcase his intellectual credentials and to offer his visitors an interpretative challenge, helping them along the way with the inscription labelling the figure of Phoenix.²³ The paintings allow for a variety of interpretative displays, ranging from identification of their subjects, relating them to works of epic poetry, but also offering scope for a moralising interpretation, warning of the perils of yielding to erotic attraction.

The display of large-scale panels in this public area of the house may also have been designed to evoke the effect of a public *pinacotheca*, of the sort

²² Lorenz 2008: 419, based on the comparison to the programme in the House of Jason. The variety shown within other Pompeian assemblages urges caution, however.

²³ Cf. the interpretative challenge set by the so-called *Tabulae Iliacae*, on which see Squire 2011.



Figure 4.5 View into Room G from the peristyle. House of the Gilded Cupids, Pompeii.

found in temple porticoes. This seems especially clear of the paintings in room G. This room is an exedra opening off the peristyle and later connected with the atrium through a small doorway. It is placed close to the atrium and tablinum, opening just to the left after a viewer enters the peristyle, and it continues the decorative programme of the entrance rooms. The three large panels in this room each formed the focal point of a wall and were framed in lavish aediculae of the sort which often seem to allude to the display of a prestigious panel painting (fig. 4.5).²⁴ The fragments of the surrounding aedicula on the south wall suggest that the original size of the panels was probably around 1.25 m wide by 1.75 m high.²⁵ The dominant place that the panels take within the walls, as well as the elaborate frames, serves to draw attention towards them both as valuable items and as objects deserving of interpretation.

The panels in the atrium and tablinum are also reasonably large. Seiler estimated the original width of the panels of the atrium at about 1.25 m, equivalent to those of the exedra, though their original height is unclear.²⁶

²⁴ Pliny, *Natural History* 35.150; Leach 2004: 134–5.

²⁵ See Seiler 1992: figs. 178, 179. ²⁶ Seiler 1992: 24–5.

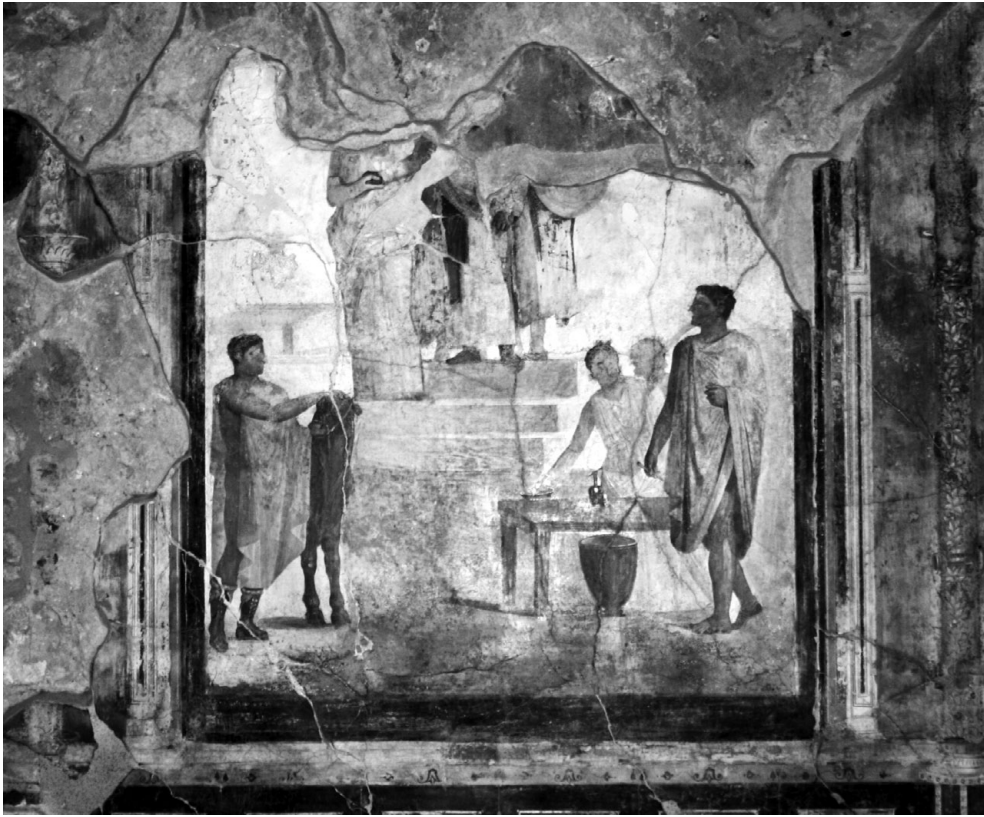


Figure 4.6 Wall-painting showing Jason and Pelias. House of the Gilded Cupids, Pompeii, room G.

The panels in the tablinum are slightly smaller, between 90 and 100 cm wide and probably taller than their breadth. Again they are set off from the rest of the wall by thin columns which served to frame them. The size of the panels and the framing devices used evoke the impression of a *pinacotheca*, similar to those which appeared in public spaces. The three rooms that feature the paintings run into one another, and the similarity of sizes and overlaps in subject matter suggest that viewers could have been expected to look for links between the paintings that overlapped their division into separate rooms.

The central eastern wall of room G is dominated by a large panel showing the arrival of Jason in Iolcus (fig. 4.6). Jason appears at the right, identified by the fact that he wears only one sandal, while in the centre of the scene is a flight of stairs on which the king, his uncle Pelias, stands, surrounded by his daughters. The upper part of the scene is lost, but

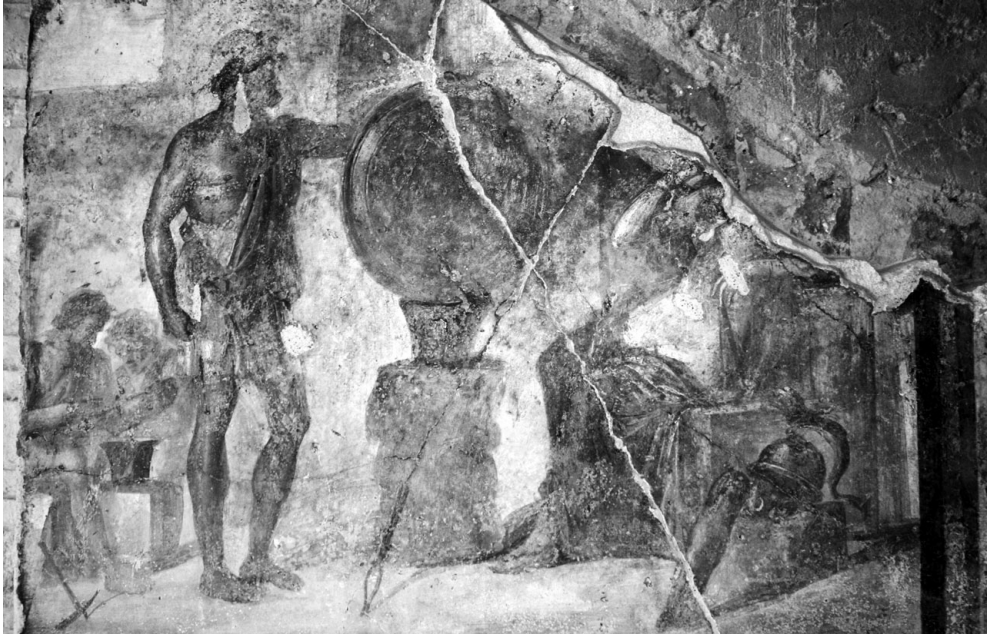


Figure 4.7 Wall-painting showing Thetis and Hephaestus. House of the Gilded Cupids, Pompeii, room G.

probably showed the palace façade in the background, as in the similar painting in the House of Jason, discussed below (pl. 3). In the foreground appear two servants, preparing a sacrifice. To the left, on the north wall, next to the entrance to the atrium, is a scene of Thetis in the workshop of Hephaestus. This painting was completed during the restoration of the walls after earthquake damage to fit into the existing Third-Style decorative scheme. While we cannot be sure that it is an accurate reflection of the original painting, it certainly ties in well both compositionally and thematically (fig. 4.7).²⁷ The semi-draped sea goddess sits to the right, while Hephaestus stands in front of her, displaying the shield he has made for Achilles. Opposite this, on the south wall, is another fragmentary painting showing three figures (fig. 4.8). At the centre a semi-draped male figure sits on a throne, with a shield to his left. To the right stands a man in a short chiton while to the left a female figure is shown seated and looking over her shoulder out at the viewer. The subject of the scene is unclear. On the basis of the remains of a group of figures labelled as

²⁷ Seiler 1992: 35, 111–12. While Seiler assumes the painting is an accurate copy of the earlier panel, Lorenz 2008: 318 urges caution.

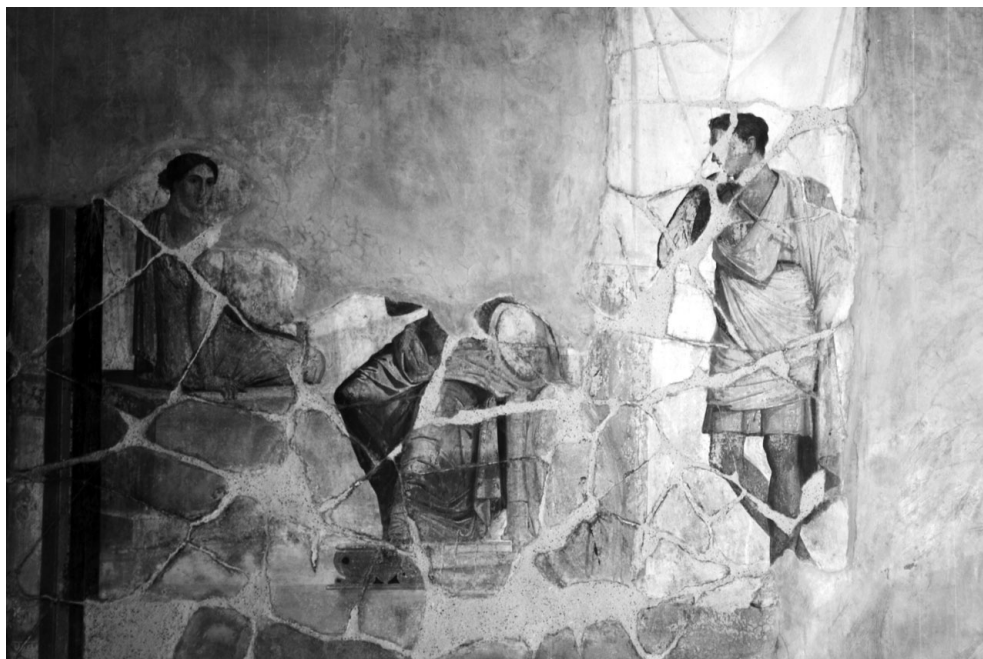


Figure 4.8 Wall-painting, possibly showing restoration of Briseis to Achilles. House of the Gilded Cupids, Pompeii, room G.



Figure 4.9 Reconstruction drawing of the Iliadic frieze in the House of the Cryptoporticus, Pompeii, showing Briseis at the council of the Achaeans.

Briseis, Talthylus and Agamemnon on the Iliadic frieze in the House of the Cryptoporticus Seiler identifies it as a scene of Agamemnon flanked by Briseis and Achilles.²⁸ The Cryptoporticus scene is fragmentary but seems to have shown Agamemnon seated on a throne in assembly with the Achaeans (fig. 4.9).²⁹ Briseis stands to the left and between and behind

²⁸ Seiler 1992: 111; *PPM* 1: 214, fig. 32.

²⁹ Spinazzola 1953: 930–3, figs. 935–7.

them was the herald Talthybius, no longer visible but recorded through labelling inscription. Here Briseis was shown standing and Achilles does not appear. If the House of the Gilded Cupids painting does represent the same theme (the main link is the enthroned figure), then it seems to represent a slightly later occasion, when Agamemnon restores Briseis to Achilles. While the hero approaches the king from the right, the woman is shown on the other side, looking back over her shoulder at the viewer.

All three paintings share a sense of stillness, and are also linked compositionally. The central painting of Jason is the most complex, with numerous figures and the central figure of Pelias raised up on a flight of steps. The compositions of the two side paintings are simpler and mirror one another. Both show two figures flanking a central point – in one, the shield which Hephaestus has made for Achilles, and in the other, the enthroned figure of Agamemnon, whose shield is an echo of that in the image opposite. In both paintings a tanned male figure stands closest to the entrance of the room (Hephaestus, Achilles), while on the other side of each painting is a seated female figure, the modestly draped body of Briseis contrasting with the sensuous semi-nudity of Thetis.

The size and framing of the paintings, and their placement in the public area of the house, suggest a desire to evoke the effect of a public *pinacotheca*. Just as in the literary texts discussed in the [last chapter](#), here too a variety of interpretations was available to the host and visitor. They could pose as educated exegetes of the paintings, making sense of the iconographical clues such as the fact that Jason wears only one sandal and the identifying inscriptions on the figure of Phoenix. The choice of some unusual scenes in the atrium and room G might also have baffled some ancient viewers, as indeed it has modern scholars, leading to competing interpretations, while the owner of the house could appear as the knowledgeable exegete, ready to identify the themes shown. The references made here to the Trojan War and Jason suggest a taste for epic themes, in contrast to the small panels showing erotic myths which appear in smaller rooms elsewhere in the house, or the Dionysiac tone of the peristyle's sculptural display.³⁰

As we saw in the discussion of Philostratus' later work, the *Imagines*, in the [last chapter](#), the pictures can be taken individually, but also set up thematic and compositional resonances with paintings in the same room as well as those in the neighbouring spaces. Thus Paris appears in the atrium and the tablinum as shepherd, lover and potential assassin. Achilles appears in the atrium as a lover, while his warrior status is evoked in the

³⁰ Lorenz [2008](#): 419–22.

exedra through the scene of Thetis and Hephaestus. The confrontation between a young hero and a king binds together the other two panels in the room, while also introducing a sense of dramatic tension which we see too in the painting of Paris and Helen in the tablinum. The direct address to the viewer, which is made by the outward gaze of both Briseis and Paris, challenges us to make sense of them, and to ponder the consequences that will follow. This programme of images seems designed to provoke a variety of interpretations and responses, ranging from admiration of these large and costly paintings to a deeper engagement with their themes and the roles they represent.³¹

Epic and Elegy in the House of Jason

As has been mentioned above, three of the subjects of the Third-Style paintings in the House of the Gilded Cupids were depicted again in the House of Jason (also known as the House of the Tragic Loves), Pompeii IX. 5, 18 (fig. 4.10).³² This is a rather more modest house, being about half the size of the House of the Gilded Cupids. It lacks an atrium and tablinum and instead the house is focussed around the peristyle, with a large reception room, f, opening onto its western side. It is in this room and the two which flank it that the mythological panels were situated. Whereas the paintings in the House of the Gilded Cupids span three different spaces around the atrium, setting up themes and links which flow from one room to another, there is a much clearer sense of thematic and atmospheric unity distinguishing the different rooms in the House of Jason.³³

The central room f is the largest in the house and probably served as a reception room and triclinium. This was where the owner of the house could present himself to his peers at the lavish dinner parties that are well attested in Latin literature.³⁴ It was a place for self-display where decoration helped to elevate the experience of dining and provoke conversation and debate. A small doorway in the left wall leads through to room d, which in turn connects with room e. While this is a relatively secluded room, it was lavishly decorated. It may have been a private room for the use of the family, but the access through d to f also suggests that it could

³¹ Seiler 1992: 112–13 suggests a moralising message while Lorenz 2008: 419 suggests the images in room G serve as exempla of *dignitas*, *virtus* and *auctoritas*.

³² Zevi 1964; PPM 9: 670–719.

³³ For discussion see Lorenz 2008: 422–7 and, on room e, Bergmann 1996.

³⁴ On the Roman banquet see especially Dunbabin 2003.

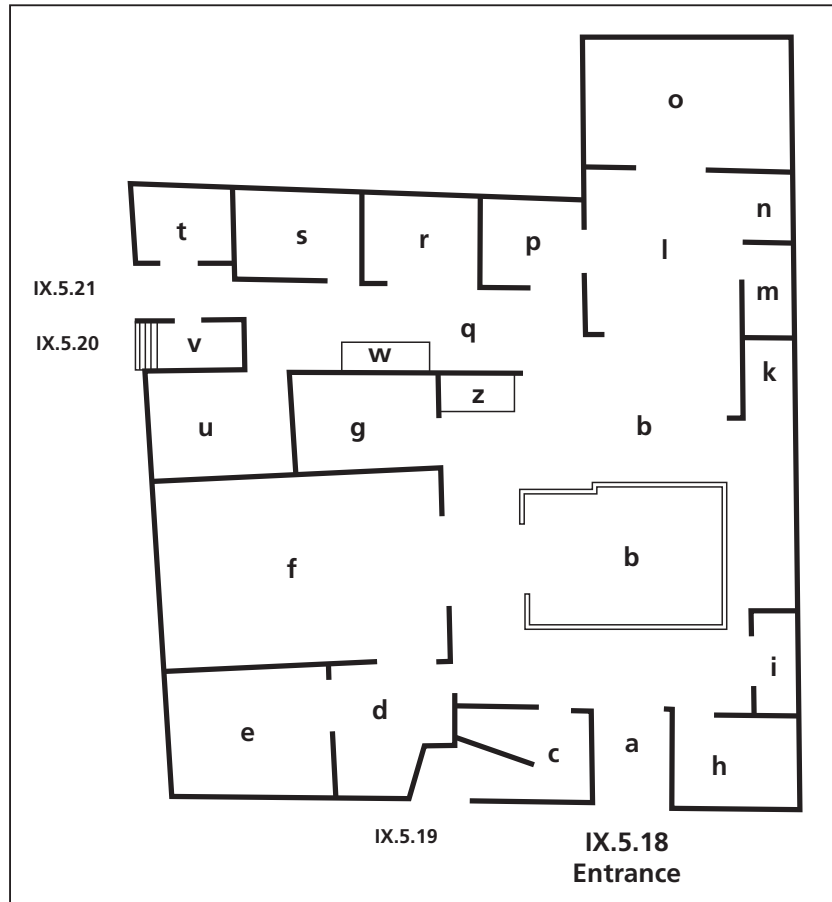


Figure 4.10 Plan of the House of Jason, Pompeii IX. 5, 18.

have accommodated meetings between members of the household and close friends or business partners. The third mythological room, g, opens directly off the peristyle, to the north of room f, and is also likely to have had a reception function, perhaps as a place for visitors to wander and wait before the *cena* or *salutatio*. All three rooms are decorated in the Third Style and were originally dominated by large panels set into the centre of the walls, most of which were removed during excavation to the Museo Nazionale in Naples.³⁵ The atmosphere and mythological tone of each room are carefully differentiated.

³⁵ The exception is the fragmentary painting on the north wall of the triclinium.

In the triclinium all three paintings seem to have featured scenes of heroes in front of palace or city façades. The centrepiece of the back wall was a painting of the meeting of Jason and Pelias (pl. 3).³⁶ As in the painting in the House of the Gilded Cupids, Jason is shown arriving in the bottom right of the scene, just as a sacrifice is being prepared. Pelias stands on the steps to the palace, surrounded by his daughters. All eyes are turned to the new arrival, creating a sense of suspense around the events that will follow.

The painting from the southern left wall also shares its theme with a painting from the House of the Gilded Cupids, though there the painting decorated the atrium. This is the painting identified as showing Achilles and Phoenix at the Temple of Apollo outside Troy, and the love of Achilles for Polyxena (pl. 4). Here the figures are spaced more widely and more clearly grouped into the Greek hero and his mentor, and the Trojan prince and princess. The woman's sensual pose and the meeting of gazes between her and Achilles identify the erotic nature of the situation. Polyxena is also accompanied here by a maidservant. Like the painting of Jason, this image represents a first meeting and a portentous moment. Both images rely on the viewer to identify their subject and draw on their knowledge of mythology to consider what events will follow from these two meetings.

The third painting was placed opposite that of Achilles and Polyxena but is now badly damaged, with little remaining from which to decipher its subject. Again it seems to have featured an architectural backdrop with a series of male figures in front. To the left a naked man stands in three-quarters view, seen from behind as he looks towards a seated figure who leans their cheek on their left hand (fig. 4.11).³⁷ The head of a third, standing, figure appears at the right and there may have been other figures in the section now lost to us. Schefold suggests that it may show Pentheus rejecting Dionysus, though no distinctive attributes of the god can be seen.³⁸ The representation in these two facing paintings of combinations of standing and seated figures provides a compositional link between them. All three are also characterised by a sense of frozen narrative, the moment of confrontation between different characters which will lead, in at least two of the cases at any rate, to one or both of their deaths. Their placement before palace or city façades lends a lofty tone to these

³⁶ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 111436.

³⁷ Note Mau 1880: 81–2 for doubts on the gender of the seated figure, which is not clear from the photograph.

³⁸ Schefold 1972: 149–50; he identifies the opposite scene as Achilles meeting Penthesilea, rather than Polyxena.



Figure 4.11 Fragmentary wall-painting, possibly showing Dionysus. House of Jason, triclinium.

renderings, taking them out of the domestic sphere and evoking the world of public, epic deeds.

The collection of paintings in the small room *e* continues the concentration on moments of dramatic tension, characterised by Bettina Bergmann (borrowing a term from Lessing's *Laocoon*) as 'the pregnant moment'.³⁹ There are, however, some differences in subject and setting from room *f*. Here, all the paintings concern the fates and choices of women, rather

³⁹ Bergmann 1996: 199 and 215 n. 1. Bergmann's article informs much of the discussion below.

than men, and all are placed in similar interior architectural spaces with tall columns. The back wall of the room featured Medea, seated with her head in her hands and a sword in her lap as she contemplates the murder of the two sons who play before her (pl. 5).⁴⁰ A bearded figure, probably the paedagogus, peers in at the scene from the top left. The paintings on the two side walls have a similar tone. On the northern wall was the meeting of Paris and Helen (pl. 6).⁴¹ This scene also appears in the tablinum of the House of the Gilded Cupids, where the two principal figures are each attended by a female figure. Here, however, they are alone, except for the figure of Eros who stands in front of the open doorway and gestures towards Paris. He looks towards Helen, though the direction of her gaze is obscured by the damage to the painting. The opposite painting showed the seated figure of Phaedra, confessing her love to the nurse who stands behind her, holding the diptych and pen on which she will write the fateful letter to Theseus (pl. 7).⁴² The object of her affections, Hippolytus, does not appear, though the presence of the diptych foreshadows the dramatic events that will result from the nurse's revelation of Phaedra's love to him.

A number of compositional parallels link the three panels, such as their interior setting and the combination of seated and standing figures. Identification of their subjects also links them, as three examples of women who did terrible deeds for the sake of love. Yet their representation in moments of decision – before Medea's infanticide, Helen's flight and Phaedra's letter – evokes our sympathy for their predicaments, as well as the sense of tension that we have already seen evoked in the large triclinium. Whereas there the narrative is focussed on the confrontation between two figures, here it is rather on the subject's inner state of mind. All three women look introspective, pondering their future course of action. The paintings suggest comparisons with the monologues of tragic women that appear in the poetry of Ovid, most notably the *Heroides*, in which these same heroines reappear lamenting their fates and struggling with the decision of what they should do.⁴³ Rooms e and f both present us with 'pregnant moments', moments of suspense in a drama where we know the ending, but with a different tone – here one of introspection rather than challenge and paused action.

⁴⁰ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 114321.

⁴¹ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 114320.

⁴² Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 114322.

⁴³ *Heroides* 4 (Phaedra), 12 (Medea); in *Heroides* 16 Paris writes to Helen. Ovid also made Medea the subject of the tragedy, now lost: *Tristia* 2.553–4; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 8.5.6. For the comparison see Bergmann 1996: 209–10.

While room f might have provoked erudite ecphraseis of the paintings, identifying their epic and (possibly) tragic models, the tone here is closer to that of elegy, in which the reader identifies emotionally with the situation of the speaker. In this emotional resonance they might also have evoked the sort of subjective response characterised by Portia's reaction to a painting of Hector and Andromache and, more comically, that of Encolpius' reaction to paintings of the loves of the gods.⁴⁴ Here the viewer, particularly a female viewer, is also invited to compare themselves to the mythical figures, to ponder on how they provide examples and warnings of the power of love. Some viewers might have used these for a moralising message about the disastrous nature of female love which leads here to the threat of incest, adultery and infanticide. However, others, following the lead of Ovid's *Heroides*, might instead seek to empathise, inhabiting the minds of these tortured women as they stand poised on the edge of disaster.⁴⁵ Whereas the backgrounds to the paintings in the other two rooms take them away from the domestic setting (cityscapes in f, landscapes in g, discussed below), here the scenes are set in interior scenes similar to that of the house itself, again bringing them closer to the viewer's own situation and prompting them to see them as analogies for their own experiences.⁴⁶ While the tones of rooms e and f differ markedly, they are also united through their subject matter. The focal figures in the back wall of each – Medea in e, Jason in f – were of course a pair of lovers. Within the rooms themselves the combination of these paintings with others on erotic and epic themes weaves them into a different set of narratives, but a viewer standing at the entrance to room d would have been able to get a glimpse of both, seeing a pair of episodes from after and before their ill-fated love affair.⁴⁷

The third room with mythological imagery is room g, a small room flanking the triclinium and opening onto the peristyle. Here the background is one of natural landscape and the tone is more idyllic. The central painting showed Europa seated on the back of the bull and surrounded by female companions (fig. 4.12).⁴⁸ Her erotic beauty is highlighted by her pose, with the right arm raised above her head, and by her naked torso. She is also adorned with jewellery. The background is a rocky landscape with

⁴⁴ Plutarch, *Brutus* 23; Petronius, *Satyricon* 83; discussed above, pp. 146–7.

⁴⁵ On Ovid's interest in the psychological insights of myth, see Graf 1988 on *Metamorphoses* and Graf 2002: 111–15 on the *Heroides* and elegies. See also Armstrong 2005: 95–114.

⁴⁶ Bergmann 1996: 207–9; Lorenz 2008: 426–7. ⁴⁷ Bergmann 1996: 213–15 with fig. 91.

⁴⁸ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 111475.



Figure 4.12 Wall-painting showing Europa on the Bull from the House of Jason, Pompeii. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 111475.

some suggestions of a sanctuary in the pillar and doorway. The figures all seem at ease with the situation, though the bull's direct gaze out at the viewer might be a hint of the abduction to come. Overall, though, the tone is less one of suspense and rather of eroticism in an idyllic landscape. Two more landscape scenes appeared on the side walls. To the right the hero Heracles, accompanied by his wife Deianira and child, was shown with

the centaur Nessus, who offers to carry Deianira across the river.⁴⁹ The opposite painting showed a scene of Pan playing music with the nymphs.⁵⁰ All the scenes have a tranquil, idyllic tone to them, though awareness of the mythological traditions about Europa and Nessus might also prompt viewers to think about the abduction and attempted rape that will shortly ensue.

This discussion of the paintings of the House of Jason suggests a number of differences from the House of the Gilded Cupids. While the two houses share a number of themes in common, including the rare scene of Achilles and Polyxena, the programmatic choices in the House of Jason seem to be determined by a desire to group particular sorts of atmospheres and scenes in particular rooms – frozen male action in the triclinium, female dilemmas in room e, and pastoral idyllic scenes in room g, whereas in the House of the Gilded Cupids, a greater prominence is given to epic themes. While in both houses the rooms decorated with Third-Style paintings lie relatively close to one another, in the House of the Gilded Cupids all three are firmly within the most public part of the house, easily accessible to visitors who could wander between the three rooms. The splitting of themes and protagonists across the three rooms opened up the space for learned viewers to think about the connections between the different images and to contrast the situations in which these heroes found themselves. In the House of Jason, by contrast, the paintings appear in a large reception room and room g, where they were easily accessible, but also in the smaller room e, access to which was more tightly controlled through the intermediate room d. The division of the paintings between the various rooms seems more firmly tied to a desire to create a particular sort of atmosphere within that room, and less to invite viewing across rooms (though the figures of Jason and Medea do create one link). While each room is closely unified in tone, allusions to public *pinacothecae* were not necessarily excluded. The painting of Heracles and Nessus in room g has been seen by some as a replica of a painting of Heracles and Deianira by the third-century artist Artemon, mentioned by Pliny, and it is possible that some viewers might have recognised this link (if indeed it did exist) to flaunt their connoisseurship.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 111474. *PPM* 9: 700–1, fig. 41.

⁵⁰ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 111473. *PPM* 9: 703–4, fig. 44.

⁵¹ Pliny, *Natural History* 35.139. *PPM* 9: 701, caption to fig. 41 (V. Strocka). For further discussion see Lippold 1951: 125–7. Note that Pliny does not mention a figure of Nessus.

The Mythological Series

In Bettina Bergmann's analysis of the paintings of room e in the House of Jason, she compares the grouping together of Phaedra, Medea and Helen with the tendency in Augustan poetry to collect examples of mythological prototypes.⁵² Propertius compares the effect that his lover Cynthia has on him to that of Helen, Phaedra, Circe and Medea, who all brought down destruction on the men they encountered.⁵³ Elsewhere, in 1.3, Propertius evokes specifically visual representations of mythological women to create a word picture of his sleeping lover. She is compared to the sleeping Ariadne, deserted by Theseus, to Andromeda sleeping after her rescue by Perseus and, finally, to a maenad, worn out after Bacchic revelry.⁵⁴

Many have noted the overlaps here with the visual arts, particularly Pompeian paintings showing the sleeping Ariadne or a maenad.⁵⁵ Propertius himself takes on the role of the onlooker in the painting – of Dionysus as he discovers his new bride, or of an amorous satyr. It is the compositional parallel, the presence of a sleeping woman, which links the three examples, while the individual stories of the women differ – Ariadne has been abandoned by Theseus while Andromeda has been saved by Perseus. The comparison made between Cynthia and these mythological heroines prompts the reader to consider Propertius' own role. Is he Theseus, the faithless hero who has abandoned his lover to her tears, as Cynthia's later reaction to him suggests (1.3.35–40), or the rescuer Bacchus/Dionysus, whose drunkenness he certainly embodies?⁵⁶ His desire to reach out and touch the sleeping woman (1.3.11–12) also suggests the lecherous response of satyrs to visions of sleeping maenads which can appear in wall-paintings.⁵⁷ The same central compositional device – an image of a man approaching a sleeping woman – allows Propertius to

⁵² Bergmann 1996: 209–11. Farrell 2013: 224–32 notes that this organising of myths according to particular themes is also a feature of mythography. See also Öhrmann 2008 on mythological paragons of wifely virtue in love elegy.

⁵³ Propertius 2.1.47–56. ⁵⁴ Propertius 1.3.1–6.

⁵⁵ See especially Valladares 2005 and Elsner 2007: 73–6. On images of Ariadne see Fredrick 1995 (especially on the onlooker's gaze) and Lorenz 2008: 96–120. An example of a sleeping maenad is found in the painting in the House of the Cithara-Player, Pompeii I. 4, 5/25, Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 11283; PPM 1: 147, fig. 51.

⁵⁶ See Propertius 1.3.9, *ebria cum multo traherem vestigia Baccho*, 'when I dragged my footsteps, unsteadied by much wine'.

⁵⁷ On the invitation to voyeurism offered by Pompeian paintings of the sleeping figures of Ariadne, maenads and hermaphrodites, see Fredrick 1995.



Figure 4.13 Wall-painting showing the birth of Adonis. House of the Dioscuri, Pompeii, room 43.

try on a variety of different mythological roles both for himself and for Cynthia.

In the House of Jason the compositional parallels between the three paintings in room e encourage us to compare them, seeing them all as examples of the terrible decisions to which women are driven by love, while the intimate nature of the space also invites emotional engagement. Similar illustrations of the terrible power of love can be found elsewhere in later pictorial series, where the details of the composition might instead prompt a more detached viewing. A room in the House of the Dioscuri, Pompeii VI. 9, 6.7, was decorated with two Fourth-Style paintings showing the myths of Myrrha and Scylla, both stories that had been told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁵⁸ These contrasting stories of daughters and fathers both revealed the destructive power of love. The panel at the centre of the

⁵⁸ Room 43 on the map given in *PPM* 4: 860; see 918, fig. 108, 927, fig. 130. On the decorative programme of the house see also Richardson 1955. Hodske 2007: 34 notes that 41 per cent of the mythological paintings he collects represent themes found also in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. I am cautious about the extent to which we should assume a deliberate echo of Ovid.

north wall shows the birth of Adonis as he is taken by nymphs from the womb of his mother, Myrrha, now transformed into a tree, although the traces of her head and arms are still visible (fig. 4.13). The myth is told at length in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁵⁹ Myrrha had conceived an incestuous love for her own father, Cinyras. On the point of committing suicide, she was stopped by her nurse who persuaded her to satisfy her lust by stealth. When Cinyras one night brought in a light by which to see his lover, he was sickened to find that it was his own daughter. Myrrha fled, pregnant, and after praying to be transformed was turned into a tree, from which the baby Adonis was duly born. The painting concentrates on the birth of Adonis rather than Myrrha's incestuous love; this was the most visually distinctive aspect of the myth and would have provoked viewers also to fill in the wider story, considering the circumstances of Adonis' conception.

This is especially clear when the painting is compared to the mythological panel on the west wall. This shows Scylla giving the lock of her father's hair to his enemy Minos, with whom she had fallen in love, another episode told at length in the *Metamorphoses*.⁶⁰ While Scylla leans over towards the seated king, he raises his hand to repel her, in horror at her action (fig. 4.14). These two images show the fateful women with their son and lover, while the fathers who are the aggrieved parties in both myths are absent. Yet the representation of these unusual scenes prompts the viewer to consider their full stories, upon which they can be seen as contrasting examples of the relationship between father and daughter. In one, the daughter's love is excessive and incestuous whereas in the other her love for her father's enemy leads her to betray him. Both myths end badly for the daughters and both stand for the destructive power of love. The painting from the south wall is now lost. It may have shown a comparable episode of destructive love, or a more positive, contrasting image.

The importance of piety of children towards their parents was a central tenet of Roman morality. Through their representation of these bad examples, these two paintings can be seen as negative *exempla*, reinforcing the importance of filial piety through their presentation of the horrors which result when this requirement for piety and obedience is ignored or perverted. They set up a contrast to the example of extreme love that was manifested, for example, in the story of Perus and Mycon, the daughter

⁵⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.298–518.

⁶⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.1–151. On the blurring in the Latin tradition between this Scylla and the Homeric one, see Hopman 2012: 203–15.



Figure 4.14 Wall-painting showing Scylla offering the lock of hair to Minos. House of the Dioscuri, Pompeii, room 43.

who suckled her father in order to keep him from death through hunger. While we have no specific evidence to support it, that myth would have been a good choice for the final painting in this room.⁶¹

The theme of female love is also continued elsewhere in the house, in the nearby peristyle. There, however, we find different forms of love contrasting with one another. The pilasters of the eastern portico of the peristyle were decorated with two large-scale figural panels. On the left was Perseus rescuing Andromeda, while on the right Medea was shown, considering the murder of her two sons.⁶² The positive side of love, in Perseus' rescue of Andromeda, is here contrasted with the negative one, Medea's infanticide as a response to her husband's abandonment of her. Elsewhere in the peristyle a painting of Penelope presented a further comparison, that of the loyal wife who awaits her husband's return.⁶³

⁶¹ Two other representations of this myth are known from Pompeii; see further pp. 161–2, above.

⁶² Both in Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 8998, 8977.

⁶³ *PPM* 4: 973–5, figs. 219–24.

The two programmes from the House of Jason and the House of the Dioscuri share an interest in the terrible things women will do for love, but the tone of them is very different. The calm, carefully spaced figures of the House of Jason, with their downcast gazes, invite an emotional engagement, whereas the busy paintings with their unusual subject matter in room 43 of the House of the Dioscuri invite interpretation, first of their subject matter and then of the themes that bind them together. Rather than encouraging empathy, the viewer is instead prompted to discuss and interpret the scenes, perhaps using them as a springboard for a rhetorical or moralising argument about the nature of love or the importance of proper filial piety.

The Paintings from the Villa of Munatia Procula

The examples discussed so far show multi-figured compositions with a stress on the narrative of the myth portrayed. Elsewhere, however, individual figures could be excerpted from their narrative context with only attributes and/or inscriptions included to identify them. This can be seen in the series of paintings now in the Vatican which come from a villa at Tor Marancia, on the outskirts of Rome.⁶⁴ The villa itself is dated through the evidence of brickstamps from AD 123 to the Hadrianic period and was identified through inscribed water pipes as belonging at one stage to one Munatia Procula.⁶⁵ The paintings have usually been seen as later works and dated anywhere from the late second century to the third or fourth centuries AD; in their current condition they have been heavily restored but a second-century date seems possible to me.⁶⁶

The ground floor of the villa was arranged around a peristyle and the paintings decorated one of a pair of rooms on the central, northern side, opposite a portico which looked down onto the valley below. The companion room contained two statues of Aphrodite, while the area between the two rooms yielded an altar and fragmentary statue of the goddess. This sculptural decoration asserts the goddess as a patron of this space, an identification that is reinforced through the subject matter of the paintings. The five paintings each show a single standing female

⁶⁴ Nogara 1907: 55–61, pls. 33–7 gives a full account of the excavation and paintings. For updated bibliography see Bianchi 2006.

⁶⁵ Nogara 1907: 55, 60.

⁶⁶ Borda 1958: 283–5 dates them to the third quarter of the second century, whereas Andreae in Helbig 1963: 353–5, no. 464 dates them to the third century AD on the grounds of the letter forms of the labels.



Figure 4.15 Wall-painting showing Myrrha from the Villa of Munatia Procula. Vatican, Sala delle Nozze Aldobrandine inv. 79633.

figure, and are around 1 m in height, and between 0.5 and 0.7 m in width. Through their attributes and inscribed names the women are identified as Myrrha, Pasiphae, Phaedra, Scylla and Canace.⁶⁷

With the exception of Myrrha, who is shown running (fig. 4.15), the others are still with their mythological situations alluded to through attributes.⁶⁸ Pasiphae appears resting her hand on the neck of the bull with whom she had fallen in love (fig. 4.16).⁶⁹ Phaedra is shown holding a piece of rope, alluding to her suicide through hanging (fig. 4.17), while

⁶⁷ Nogara 1907: 56 notes that the original account by Biondi mentions a sixth, lacking an inscription but possibly representing Medea, but he believes that Biondi erroneously included a painting from a different provenance.

⁶⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.476 has Scylla running from her father's wrath when the identity of his secret lover is revealed.

⁶⁹ Scholars have debated whether this animal is the bull himself or, on comparison with scenes of Pasiphae and Daedalus, the wooden cow within which she hides to mate with the bull. The lack of obvious signs of artificiality, such as the platform seen in the painting in the House of Meleager (fig. 4.30, c, below), and the size of the animal suggest to me that the bull is meant, contra Nogara 1907: 58.



Figure 4.16 Wall-painting showing Pasiphaë from the Villa of Munatia Procula. Vatican, Sala delle Nozze Aldobrandine inv. 79634.

Scylla grasps her father's lock of hair in her right hand, while her left rests on a window ledge, alluding to her betrayal of her father out of love for his enemy Minos, who was besieging the city (fig. 4.18). The figure of Canace holds a dagger in her left hand, alluding to her forced suicide after her father discovered her incestuous love for her brother, and possibly also held a pen in her right hand, though this is no longer clear (fig. 4.19).⁷⁰

The five women are united by their forbidden loves, which bring down destruction on them and others. Three yield to incestuous loves – Myrrha for her father, Canace for her brother and Phaedra for her adoptive

⁷⁰ Nogara 1907: 58 cites Biondi on the presence of a pen, which would suggest directly Ovid's representation of her writing to her brother: *Heroides* 11.



Figure 4.17 Wall-painting showing Phaedra from the Villa of Munatia Procula. Vatican, Sala delle Nozze Aldobrandine inv. 79636.

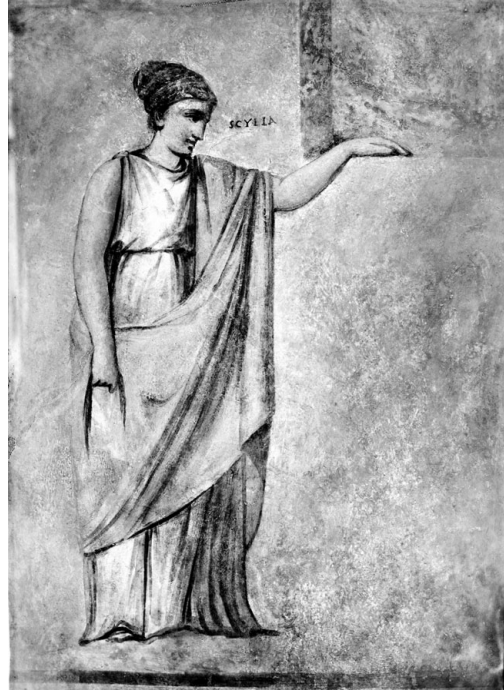


Figure 4.18 Wall-painting showing Scylla from the Villa of Munatia Procula. Vatican, Sala delle Nozze Aldobrandine inv. 79635.

son – while the other two betray their homelands or husbands with forbidden loves – Scylla’s love for Minos prompts her to cut off her father’s magic lock, which guarantees the survival of his kingdom, while Pasiphae contrives to mate with a bull, producing the Minotaur who will bring shame on her husband and homeland. In all but one case, the advances of the women are unwelcome, and instead invite horror and rejection from those they love.⁷¹

The paintings from Tor Marancia do not retell the stories, they merely allude to them and rely on an informed viewer to supply the details of the myth. Through the repetition of a series of standing female figures, identified by inscriptions, we are prompted to supply the links, and to see them as a catalogue of examples of the devastating effects of forbidden love. In their combination with statues of Aphrodite in the neighbouring room, and the statue and altar in the peristyle, they also need to be seen in the

⁷¹ In Ovid’s portrayal Canace’s love is reciprocated by her brother.



Figure 4.19 Wall-painting showing Canace from the Villa of Munatia Procula. Vatican, Sala delle Nozze Aldobrandine inv. 79632.

context of a space marked out as sacred to Aphrodite. These mythological tales can be seen as proof of the goddess' power, warning of the potential destruction she could wreak, and the need to worship and respect her.⁷²

In Katharina Lorenz's analysis of the combinations of mythological paintings found in Pompeii she discerns a number of options for combining images: she identifies these as affirmative, consecutive, contrasting and complementary. Depending on their combinations, paintings can support one another in their meaning or open up room for debating and

⁷² In this they have resonances with the statue of Athena and its flanking paintings as described in Lucian, *On the Hall* 25–7 (see above, [Chapter 3](#)). Compare also the statues proving Aphrodite's power in Pompey's portico, discussed in [Chapter 1](#), and the Niobids as proof of Artemis' powers in the *Horti Sallustiani* ([Chapter 2](#)).

contrasting situations and values.⁷³ We can see these principles at play in the examples discussed above. The paintings in the House of Jason and from Tor Marancia complement one another both visually and thematically, affirming the destructive power of love through a series of illustrative examples. In the House of the Dioscuri, the paintings in room 8 are also complementary in theme (though not in composition, as in the previous examples), whereas those in the peristyle open up a series of contrasting images. Lorenz is keen to stress that these connections work at a visual level and that we do not need to draft in analogies from rhetoric.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, her visual categories do agree closely with the rhetorical principles of *similitudo*, *vicinitas* and *contrarium*. The ways paintings were combined allowed them to serve as a series of examples or analogies. Whether these were used to prove a rhetorical argument or rather to prompt an emotional identification with the situations presented was up to the viewer, but could also be influenced by elements such as the background to the image, which could distance it or bring it into the viewer's own experience, the tone of the painting, achieved through details such as thoughtful or challenging gazes, and the different circumstances of viewing within a public space such as the atrium or peristyle, a reception space like a triclinium, or a more private enclosed room.

Debate and Paradigm in the House of the Tragic Poet

As we have seen, compositional overlaps between paintings invited the ancient viewer to compare and contrast them, and could provoke verbal displays of rhetoric, in which the paintings acted as *exempla*. This is especially clear from Bettina Bergmann's analysis of the Fourth-Style paintings of the atrium of the House of the Tragic Poet, Pompeii VI. 8, 3.5.⁷⁵ While the majority of the paintings were removed to the museum at Naples, Bergmann reconstructs the display to show how it might have appeared to an ancient viewer. She notes that the different paintings are linked together through formal compositional devices, particularly in the depiction of dark-skinned, seated male figures clothed in dark reds or purples next to standing pale-skinned females in pastel colours.⁷⁶ These parallels lead one to consider the different mythological episodes presented in the

⁷³ Lorenz 2008: 261–328, esp. 268–9.

⁷⁴ Lorenz 2008: 42–4 contra Brilliant 1984: 69–71; Bergmann 1994: esp. 246.

⁷⁵ PPM 4: 527–603. ⁷⁶ Bergmann 1994: 241.

paintings, and the roles which men and, especially, women play within them.

Six paintings decorated the walls of the atrium, with those on the southeastern and eastern sides being the best preserved.⁷⁷ Turning right from the entrance, a visitor to the house saw first a representation of a divine couple (pl. 8).⁷⁸ A bearded, almost naked male figure sits to the right, clasping with his right hand the wrist of the richly dressed woman who stands in front of him. She wears a veil on her head, and looks out at the viewer. The winged figure behind her is probably that of Iris. Bergmann identifies the couple as Zeus and Hera, shown at the moment of their marriage, though she notes that other mythological couples have also been suggested.⁷⁹ The woman seems to go willingly, and her status is clear from her jewellery and dress, but the man's gesture of control also identifies her role within the context of exchange. The next painting, across the corner on the eastern wall, shows the removal of Briseis from Achilles, at the orders of Agamemnon (pl. 9).⁸⁰ This is of course a defining moment in the Trojan War, marking the point at which Achilles decides to withdraw from the fighting, as told in the *Iliad*. The scene is much more densely packed than the previous one, showing a cluster of male figures in the background. Here again a seated semi-naked man looks at a standing draped female, who gazes out at the viewer. Another man grasps her arm, taking her away from the central hero.

The similarities of the gestures and the overlaps with the poses prompt us to consider the different situations represented. In both the woman appears as a possession of men, whether within the sanctity of marriage or as a prize of war, and her fate seems to be one of being given or taken, rather than offering herself freely. The next painting perhaps shows a more active role for the woman involved.⁸¹ Here we see a woman walking up the gangway onto a ship (fig. 4.20). The rest of the panel is lost but it is thought to have shown Paris, and the scene identified as Helen's departure with him.⁸² Again we have a contrasting relationship between a man and a woman. Though here Helen herself decides to leave her wedded husband, she is again shown being helped onto the boat through a servant who takes her arm. Her gaze downwards also seems to betray some ambiguity about what she is doing. Rather than asserting her confidence, here too

⁷⁷ For full discussion see Bergmann 1994: 232–46.

⁷⁸ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9559.

⁷⁹ See also PPM 4: 538–9, fig. 20.

⁸⁰ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9105.

⁸¹ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9108.

⁸² An alternative reading as Chryseis seems less likely; see Hodske 2007: 267.



Figure 4.20 Wall-painting showing the Departure of Helen, from the House of the Tragic Poet, Pompeii. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9108.

there seems to be a suggestion of constraint, that the woman is prey to forces beyond her own control.

The three paintings on this side of the atrium all show a female figure being led by a male figure but in a number of contrasting ways – in the first Hera is led towards Zeus, while Briseis is taken away from Achilles. In the third Helen is led onto a boat, away from her lawful husband and towards, we assume, the figure of Paris. All three images are linked by their contrasting representations of women in relation to the men they love, and their roles vary from lawful wife to concubine and adulterous lover.⁸³

The paintings on the opposite side of the room were less well preserved at the time of excavation and remained *in situ*. They have since faded

⁸³ Bergmann 1994: 245.



Figure 4.21 Copy of the paintings in the atrium of the House of the Tragic Poet, Pompeii, by Francesco Morelli.

beyond recognition but some identifications can be made from the copies made in the 1820s by Francesco Morelli.⁸⁴ The painting opposite that of Helen was only preserved in its bottom right corner, but the presence of a pair of feet in an active stance, with another foot behind, has been linked with representations elsewhere of the Anger of Achilles in which Achilles draws his sword to attack Agamemnon before being restrained by the goddess Athena (fig. 4.21, right).⁸⁵ The central painting on the western side preserved the lower half of the panel and showed a marine scene with a woman seated across a man's lap (fig. 4.21, left). The trident held by an Eros identifies the man as Poseidon, and the woman is likely to have been Amphitrite shown in the scene of Poseidon's abduction of her.⁸⁶ Continuing around the room back to the entrance way, the painting immediately to the right of the entrance showed a fully naked female figure at its left edge (fig. 4.22). Her gesture of self-display, with her right arm above her head and billowing drapery behind, links her to representations of Aphrodite in the scene of the Judgement of Paris, and the scale of the figure would allow for a multi-figured composition showing Paris, Hermes and the other goddesses.

⁸⁴ *PPM* 4: 539–41.

⁸⁵ Bergmann 1994: 237, 241, fig. 27. See also the similar image from the House of the Dioscuri, discussed by Trimble 2002.

⁸⁶ A similar scene was found at Stabiae: Bergmann 1994: 240, fig. 26.

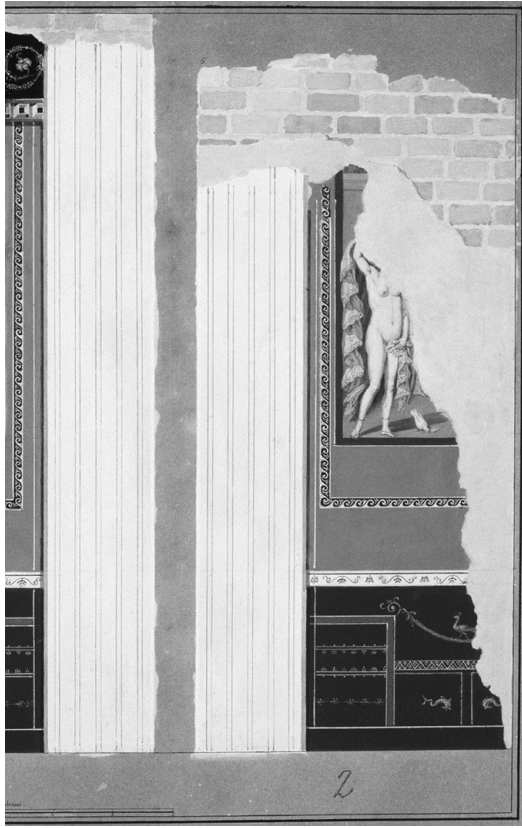


Figure 4.22 Copy of the painting of Aphrodite in the atrium of the House of the Tragic Poet, Pompeii, by Francesco Morelli.

Though fragmentary, it seems clear that the details and tone of these paintings contrasted with those opposite. In two we find naked females in contrast to the heavily draped women on the eastern side of the room, while in the paintings of Poseidon and Achilles we have action scenes which contrast with the more static poses elsewhere. While two of the paintings continue the theme of the Trojan War shown in the paintings of Briseis and Helen, that of Poseidon and Amphitrite returns to the divine sphere shown in the painting of Zeus and Hera. Nearly all the paintings seem to concentrate on different representations of women – as bride, concubine, adulterous wife, goddess of sexuality or object of desire. In this the image of the Wrath of Achilles seems out of kilter with the rest. Yet it is possible that the presence of Athena in the painting, whose foot is probably to be identified hovering behind the

figure of Achilles, introduced a new role for a woman, that of female protectress.

Where the paintings are best preserved, we see the use of compositional formulae as devices to encourage comparison of the different mythological types. Once established, these types could then be extended throughout the house, when the viewer came across other mythological scenes such as those of Alcestis in the tablinum and Iphigenia in the peristyle.⁸⁷ Yet the paintings of the atrium also include a number linked by their theme, that of the Trojan War. Two separate programmes thus seem to be presented in the house: that of the roles of woman, which relies especially on the compositional parallels, and that of the history of the Trojan War, which is linked by thematic resonances. It was up to the viewer to choose which to focus on, or whether to expand from these into other programmatic resonances.

A similar use of compositional features to present a catalogue of different types can be found in later art and in other media. I have argued elsewhere that the Spada reliefs, a group of marble reliefs on mythological subjects that probably decorated a villa just outside Rome, can be compared with Pompeian paintings in the programme of images that they offer.⁸⁸ The representation in these panels of individual standing heroes, or contrasting pairs of figures, invites consideration of different types of male hero, the archetypal hero alone with his horse or dogs, as in the figures of Bellerophon and Adonis (fig. 2.8 above), or the contrasting types of hero represented by the pairing of Diomedes and Odysseus, or the musical Amphion.⁸⁹

The paintings in the House of the Tragic Poet and the scenes on the Spada reliefs can be seen as opening up possibilities for emulation, by embodying different types of male and female roles through mythological prototypes. Some of these we might seek to emulate, whereas others could be rejected. The overall suggestion is of an openness for debate and identification which prompts discussion among its viewers. In other cases, however, as in the paintings of the House of Jason, there is a much tighter link between the figures shown. While we might sympathise with the situations in which Medea, Phaedra and Helen find themselves, all can be seen as negative *exempla*, embodiments of infanticide, incest and adultery which show the perils of yielding too much to love.

⁸⁷ Further Bergmann 1994: 232–5; see also 250, fig. 33 on other figural paintings within the house.

⁸⁸ Newby 2002a. ⁸⁹ Newby 2002a: 137–8. See also pp. 102–4 above.

Aphrodite, Adonis and Dionysus in the Villa Negroni

The paintings in the House of the Tragic Poet and the Spada reliefs can be read as spurs to debate about the proper roles of men and women, offering themselves as *exempla* from which a particular argument could be constructed. The paintings in the House of the Tragic Poet also permit themselves to be read as part of programmes that spill over the boundaries of a single room, into the images elsewhere of Alcestis and Iphigenia, two women who are sacrificed for the good of their male kin (husband and father) but may ultimately escape their fates.⁹⁰

In this section I will analyse a group of paintings which are unfortunately no longer extant and can only be studied through the engravings made of them in the eighteenth century. Despite this problem there are good reasons for discussing this set of images since they were found in an elite house in Rome and date from the second century. As with the paintings from Tor Marancia, they allow us to compare the sort of programmes we have seen in Pompeii with those from houses in or near the capital, to see whether similar sorts of viewing and interpretations could be provoked here too.

The house was discovered in 1777, in the grounds of the Villa Negroni between Santa Maria Maggiore and Santa Maria degli Angeli, in the area of the Esquiline hill.⁹¹ Brick stamps dating to AD 134 give a *terminus post quem* and comparison of the painted decoration to that of the House of the Muses at Ostia suggests that the paintings should be dated to the late Hadrianic or early Antonine period.⁹² The house was arranged into two halves, separated by a peristyle (fig. 4.23). Access through the front vestibule A gave access to two sequential rooms, B and C, which in turn led onto the peristyle. The two long sides of the peristyle were centred around the large reception rooms D and F. While D was flanked by room C and the corridor H, which gave access to an upper level, F was flanked by two small rooms, G and E. Painted mythological panels were found in five of the rooms (B, C, D, E, G), while room F seems to have had three niches in its back wall, probably for the display of statuary or reliefs.

The painted panels were detached from the walls and sold to Frederick Hervey, Bishop of Derry, who seems to have intended them for

⁹⁰ Bergmann 1994: 249–51.

⁹¹ For early reports see Buti, *Manifesto* (no date), preserved in *Hardwicke Papers*, Vol. 30, British Library Add. Ms. 35378, fols. 316–17, and Massimo 1836: 213–16. H. Joyce 1983 gives a careful appraisal of the evidence. See also Paris 1996.

⁹² H. Joyce 1983: 435–6.

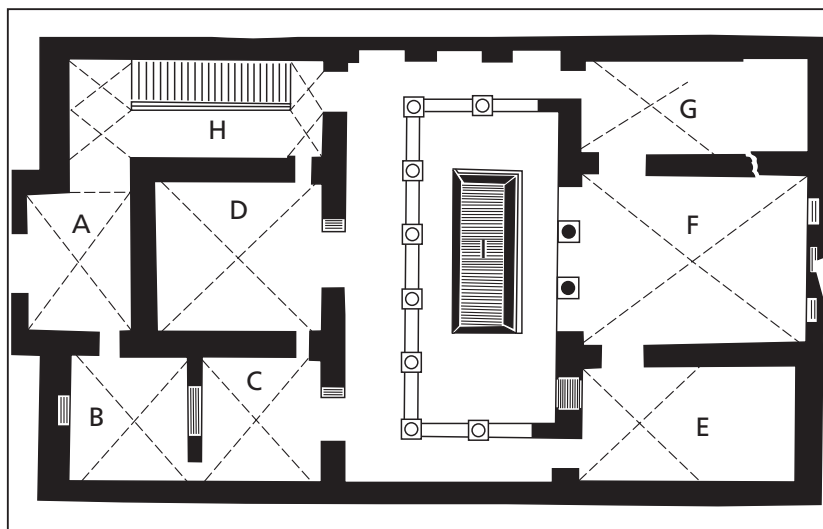


Figure 4.23 Plan of the Roman house found at the Villa Negroni, Rome.

his country house of Downhill in Ireland, though they appear to have been lost or destroyed en route.⁹³ The main record of them is in a series of engravings published over a number of years by Carlo Buti.⁹⁴ The project was begun by the artist Antonio Raphael Mengs but completed by his brother-in-law, Anton von Maron, and then engraved by Angelo Campanella.⁹⁵ The broad faithfulness of the engravings is suggested by the similarities to drawings made, probably independently, by Thomas Hardwick, though it should be noted that there are some small differences between the two in terms of the backgrounds and the direction of the gaze, which should caution us against putting too much weight on these features.⁹⁶

Drawing on the engravings and the written reports of the excavations, Hetty Joyce was able to reconstruct the decorative programme of the house. Room B was decorated with a cycle of paintings representing the hero Adonis, most often represented in Roman art as the lover of Aphrodite, who meets an untimely death while hunting. The end wall of this room featured a painted statue of Adonis, naked and holding a spear,

⁹³ H. Joyce 1983: 425–6.

⁹⁴ Campanella 1778–86. Partial sets of the plates are held in the British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, and the Sir John Soane Museum, London, as well as in the British School at Rome and are variously catalogued under the names of Campanella or Buti. For other copies see Joyce 1983: 427.

⁹⁵ H. Joyce 1983: 425–8 gives a detailed account. ⁹⁶ H. Joyce 1983: 433–4.



Figure 4.25 Engraving of the decoration of room B in the Villa Negroni, showing Adonis embarking on the hunt.

illustrating the powers of the goddess Aphrodite, whose statues stood nearby.⁹⁷

The adjoining room C was decorated with more images of Adonis' lover, Aphrodite. No particular narrative is conveyed in these images. In one, Aphrodite stands, displaying herself, accompanied by three Erotes (pl. 10), while in the other she is shown seated on a rock while a Cupid swims at her feet, tended by a maid, and another prepares to dive into the water. The scene has parallels to the images of Aphrodite fishing which are popular at Pompeii, though here instead she raises her left hand to her hair, perhaps in an echo of the Aphrodite Anadyomene pose. The overall effect of these images is to assert the power and eroticism of the goddess and to evoke a mythological fantasy world of beauty and eroticism.

The two protagonists of rooms B and C may have been reunited across the peristyle in room E. The back section of this room was lower, in

⁹⁷ Lucian, *On the Hall* 25–7. See above, pp. 153 and 192–3.

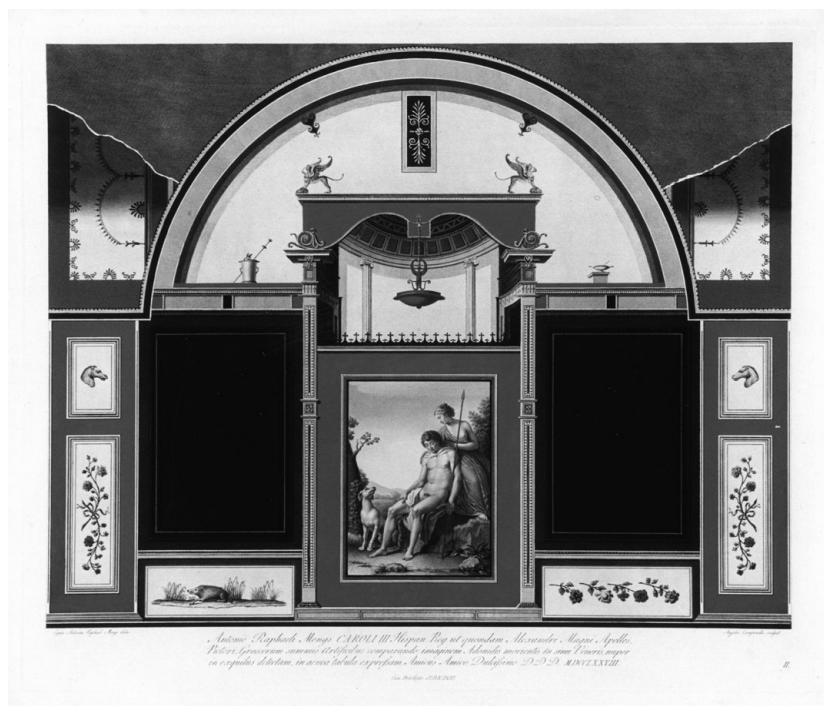


Figure 4.26 Engraving of the decoration of room B in the Villa Negroni, showing Aphrodite tending to the wounded Adonis.

contrast to the barrel-vaulted front sections, suggesting that this area may have accommodated a bed. Reconstructing its decoration poses a number of problems; whereas the engravings of the walls in rooms B, C and D all show consistent architectural frames around their central panels, the remaining engravings do not include any exact pairs. Despite some problems, Joyce's suggestion that Buti's plates VI and IX probably belonged in this room seems convincing.⁹⁸ The central panels of these walls show two sets of couples. In one, both are seated. The female figure sits on a golden throne or couch, with her feet on a footstool, while the man also sits on another golden chair in the foreground. A child stands between them (pl. 11). On comparison with the enthroned couple from the villa at Boscoreale as interpreted by Phyllis Lehmann, Joyce identifies the couple as Adonis and Aphrodite.⁹⁹ The depiction of the couple, with

⁹⁸ H. Joyce 1983: 430–2.

⁹⁹ Lehmann 1953: 23–81, pl. 4; H. Joyce 1983: 431.

the female seated on a more imposing throne, perhaps marks out her superior status.¹⁰⁰

Opposite, another seated female figure, this time shown with a naked torso, is approached by a man holding a spear (pl. 12); while some have seen this as Aphrodite and Ares, it may also have alluded to another erotic couple, perhaps Aphrodite and Anchises, or even Adonis again. The precise identities of the couples represented here remain elusive. The four figures differ from one another in their dress, hair colour and attributes: while the enthroned man wears sandals, the other is barefoot but shown with a wreath in his hair, and the two female figures have different hair colour and dress. Yet there are similar inconsistencies between the figures of Aphrodite shown in rooms B and C, and we cannot be sure whether these details go back to the original paintings or the eighteenth-century copyists. Despite the problems of giving precise names to the figures, the stress here on erotic unity and the presentation in one of these images of the man as a heroic hunter bring together the themes of rooms B and C. The images coalesce male virtue and female beauty into a unified image of the perfect couple which, especially in the painting where both are shown seated in an imposing manner, might also have evoked the owners of the house themselves.

While the individual rooms are dominated by a particular theme (the life-story of Adonis in B, Aphrodite in C), the passage through these rooms and across into room E also sets up an idealised image of the perfect couple, as a model to be adopted, or perhaps debated, by viewers within the house. The man is active, a hunter, but also a figure of erotic appeal, while the woman is his equal partner, a figure of power and status, as well as desirability.

The other painted rooms in the house continue the display of large figural panels within painted aedicula, but vary the tone and theme of these. The large room D which opens off the peristyle is decorated with three panels evoking the joys of Dionysiac excess.¹⁰¹ The back wall showed a satyr playing the double pipes and accompanied by a Silenus and bacchant. The left wall showed the drunken Heracles, supported by a youth, while

¹⁰⁰ Alternatively her seat could be seen as a couch, alluding to the couple's forthcoming sexual union; a similar lavish couch appears on an erotic scene in the Villa della Farnesina, room D: Mols and Moormann 2008: 35, fig. 33.

¹⁰¹ H. Joyce 1983: 430.



Figure 4.27 Engraving of the decoration of room D in the Villa Negroni, showing Dionysus and Ariadne.

Dionysus and Ariadne stood opposite on the right-hand wall (fig. 4.27). The paintings as a whole evoke the pleasures of the Dionysiac world, identifying these in turn as drink, music and love.

The last room for which paintings are attested, room G, is the hardest of all to recreate. Massimo said that it had only one painting, devoted to Pallas.¹⁰² This seems to be illustrated in Buti's plate VIII, which shows the goddess Athena watching the erection of a trophy. However, the engravings also include a further plate, X, whose architectural decoration would fit room G and shows some parallels to that of plate VIII. The central panel here shows two women sacrificing. However, no such theme is mentioned in the written accounts of the house and Joyce suspects that it is a pastiche included for the sake of symmetry.¹⁰³ The evidence of the one painting, however, suggests that this room may have had a different tone from the others, alluding to warfare and perhaps, more generally through the representation of Athena, to the arts.

There are a number of difficulties in assessing the tone of paintings that decorated this house, since these only lie in details such as the gazes

¹⁰² Massimo 1836: 314; Buti, *Manifesto*, in the key to his plan, mentions room G as having a painting of Pallas, but does not say there that it is the only painting.

¹⁰³ H. Joyce 1983: 434–5.

between figures or out to the viewer or in the backgrounds to the action shown, precisely those aspects which are most likely to have been changed by the eighteenth-century artist to fit his own aesthetic tastes.¹⁰⁴ Yet at least in rooms B, C, D and E there does seem to be a desire to group the images of any one room around a particular divine figure or theme. It is notable that Massimo's account of the excavations records the discovery in the house also of a statuette of Aphrodite and three marble Fauns, suggesting that the painted decoration of the house was complemented by its sculptural display, though the precise findspots of the statues are not recorded.¹⁰⁵

The individual panels can be seen as *exempla* of the power of the gods Aphrodite and Dionysus, and as an invitation into the atmosphere of heroism, love and luxury that the paintings evoke.¹⁰⁶ Yet they can also be read as setting up mythological models for human behaviour which have parallels in other second-century art. The calmness and static quality of the paintings from room B are especially close to the Spada reliefs, as in the panel where Adonis stands fatally wounded, accompanied by his dog (fig. 2.8 above). Action and event are mostly absent in these paintings, with the figures instead presented in isolated tableaux that invite the viewer to ponder on the values they represent. Unlike some of the mythological figures discussed earlier, here the overwhelming impression is that these are positive models, presenting love, hunting and beauty as worthy models to follow. These values can be seen elsewhere in second-century art: hunting as a key male virtue was celebrated in the Hadrianic hunting *tondi*, later reused on the Arch of Constantine, while Adonis appears as a mythological analogy for male *virtus* on sarcophagi from the mid-second century AD.¹⁰⁷ The value of Venus/Aphrodite as a model for real Roman women can also be seen from the late first century onwards in the depiction of women in the guise of the goddess in funerary contexts.¹⁰⁸ Here these mythological images set up the house as a place of cultivated entertainment, but also suggest the power of myth to present paradigms for contemporary human experience and behaviour.

¹⁰⁴ H. Joyce 1983: 434 suggests that Mengs may have altered the painting of the seated Aphrodite in room C 'to make her conform to his own Rococo tastes'.

¹⁰⁵ Massimo 1836: 214, citing the reports in *Diario di Roma*, no. 304, p. 3 of 29.11.1777.

¹⁰⁶ On Aphrodite and Dionysus as themes in domestic decoration see Zanker 1998 and Hales 2008. Note, however, Ling 1995 showing that Dionysus is not as popular in dining settings as one might suppose.

¹⁰⁷ On the hunting *tondi* see Oppen 2008: 181–3; on the sarcophagi see Grassinger 1999: 70–90.

¹⁰⁸ Wrede 1981: 306–23; D'Ambra 1996; Kousser 2007.

Role-models, *pinacothecae* and Erotic Enticements: Experiencing the Paintings of the House of Meleager

So far in this chapter we have considered the ways that paintings displayed in domestic settings could help to evoke the atmosphere of public *pinacothecae*, but could also invite their viewers to interpret them as representations of the different fates of men or women, or as contrasting examples of the experience of love. However, throughout ancient literary accounts of images a dominant feature is also their naturalistic lure. From Hellenistic epigrams to the anecdotes preserved in Pliny the Elder, and especially in the ecphraseis of Philostratus, one of the major powers of naturalistic art, whether sculpted or painted, lies in its ability to deceive the viewer into accepting it as the truth, pulling them into the world of the visual image.

Sometimes this deception appears to act as a joke on, or the undermining of, the viewer. In Hellenistic epigrams on Myron's cow, herdsmen are rebuked for their failure to discern representation from reality as they seek to call in the bronze cow along with the rest of the herd.¹⁰⁹ Pliny's famous anecdote of the contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasius too relies on the joke on Zeuxis when he fails to realise that the curtain he can see is painted rather than real.¹¹⁰ Yet often this naturalistic deception goes hand in hand with an emotional or erotic one. Calves attempt to suckle from Myron's cow, and bulls to mate with it.¹¹¹ In Ovid's account of the sculptor Pygmalion the artist becomes so deceived by his own realism that he treats the statue as a real woman, attempting to embrace her, in a parallel to the famous anecdote of a man who attempted to have sex with the Aphrodite of Cnidus statue.¹¹² The erotic lures of naturalism are also a prevailing theme of Philostratus' *Imagines*. Philostratus' immersion into the realism of the paintings he views is often accompanied by a stress on the erotic attraction of the image, and the integral link between viewing and desire: the satyrs who look on the sleeping Olympus want to kiss him, the lovers of a boy represented in the painting *Hunters* look at him as if he were a picture, and Narcissus is fatally fooled by the realism of his own

¹⁰⁹ *Greek Anthology* 9.715, 794, 797. For discussions see Goldhill 2007: 15–19 and Squire 2010. For a comprehensive account of the treatment of artworks in Hellenistic poetry see Männlein-Robert 2007.

¹¹⁰ Pliny, *Natural History* 35.65. ¹¹¹ *Greek Anthology* 9.721, 730, 734, 735.

¹¹² Aphrodite of Cnidus: Pliny, *Natural History* 36.21; Lucian, *Amores* 15–16. On Pygmalion (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.243–97) see Elsner 2007: 113–31.

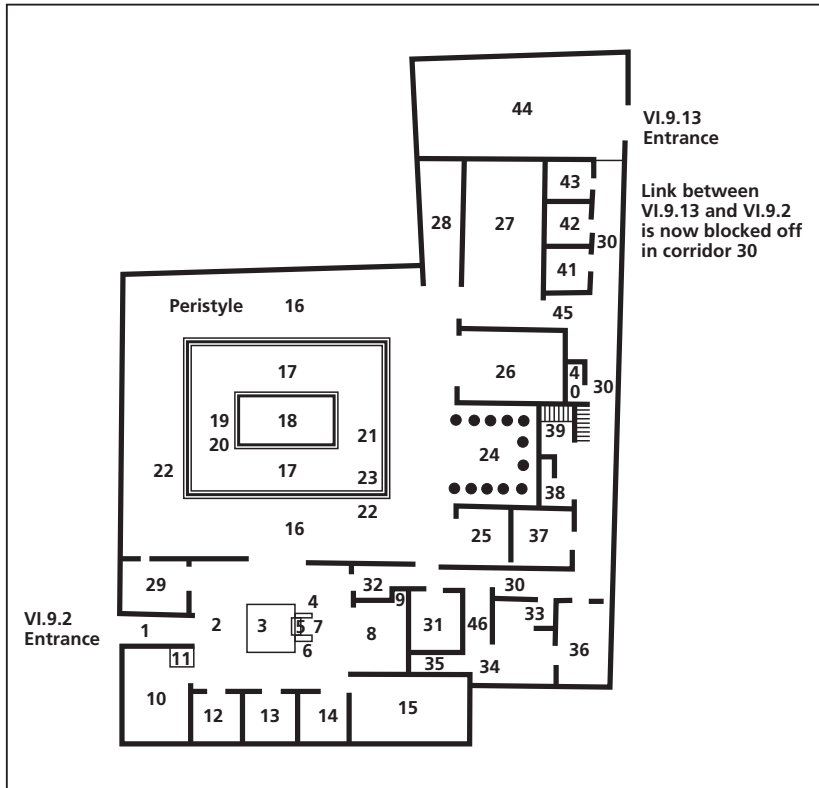


Figure 4.28 Plan of the House of Meleager, Pompeii VI. 9, 2.13.

reflection into thinking that it shows a real boy whom he can love and touch.¹¹³

In the final section of this chapter I want to consider how all these different modes of viewing were accommodated within a single house. For my case study I have chosen the House of Meleager, Pompeii VI. 9, 2.13, which when excavated in 1830–1 boasted a remarkable collection of mythological images, spread throughout the house (fig. 4.28).¹¹⁴ Many of the paintings discovered were removed at the time of excavation, while those that remained are often in a bad state of repair. Reconstructing the display thus relies on consulting old reports and drawings of the paintings,

¹¹³ Philostratus, *Imagines* 1.20.2; 1.28.2; 1.23.3–5; see pp. 151–2 above. On Philostratus' absorption into the imaged world see Bryson 1994: 255–83; Elsner 1995: 32–6; on Narcissus as a focus for reflections on the dangers of naturalism see especially Elsner 1996; 2007: 132–76.

¹¹⁴ *PPM* 4: 660–818; for recent discussions of the decoration see Leach 2004: 196–200 and Lorenz 2008: 330–53.

as well as the remains *in situ* and in the museum at Naples.¹¹⁵ The house was lavishly redecorated in the Fourth Style of wall-painting after the earthquake of AD 62 and featured mythological paintings throughout.¹¹⁶

The tone is set as soon as one enters the house. The walls of the entrance way (1) are decorated with facing mythological scenes representing Meleager and Atalanta on the left and Demeter and Hermes on the right. In the latter scene the god is shown giving a bag of money to the seated goddess, identifying him with the Roman Mercury, god of merchants and prosperity. The image thus suggests the prosperity of the house and its owners, and acts apotropaically to warn off ill-luck. The painting opposite also shows a standing and a seated figure but here it is the male figure who is seated, holding a spear and looking out at the viewer (fig. 4.29). In front of him, but also turned towards the viewer, is a woman dressed in a chiton and wearing a broad-brimmed hat. She too carries two spears in her left hand, only just visible. In the bottom left corner of the image was shown a boar, now invisible but shown in old drawings and descriptions. The couple thus represent Meleager and Atalanta in the scene after the killing of the Calydonian boar. While other representations of this scene show the figures looking at each other, suggesting the erotic attraction between them, here both look out at the viewer.¹¹⁷ Rather than stressing the erotic or mythological narrative, the image instead asserts the self-confidence of the figures, their success in hunting perhaps acting as a symbol of good fortune and, like the image opposite, thus serving to protect the house and those who dwell within.

The atrium (2) was also decorated with large mythological paintings.¹¹⁸ Though we have discussed a number of atria with mythological paintings, this was in fact relatively rare in Pompeii. The decision to include paintings in this very public space of family self-representation suggests a deliberate attempt to imitate the public space of a *pinacotheca*, a belief in the elevating power of myth to raise the status of the house and the use of mythological parallels to serve as models of different sorts of behaviour, helping to structure debate about the proper norms of male and female conduct.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ The main sources are Bechi 1831; Fiorelli 1862; Helbig 1868; Overbeck 1884: 307–14. See *PPM* 4: 660–919 for further details.

¹¹⁶ On the dating see *PPM* 4: 660 and Leach 2004: 196, though Lorenz 2008: 330 puts the redecoration just before the earthquake.

¹¹⁷ Lorenz 2008: 55–75 discusses representations of the couple.

¹¹⁸ All were at least 1 metre square.

¹¹⁹ On myths in the atrium see Lorenz 2008: 354–60, concentrating especially on the assertion of normative roles.



Figure 4.29 Wall-painting of Meleager and Atalanta, House of Meleager, Pompeii, fauces.

Here four images were displayed in a chiastic arrangement (fig. 4.30). On the left wall of the atrium as one enters was a large painting showing Thetis in the workshop of Hephaestus, roughly 1 metre square (fig. 4.30, a).¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9528.

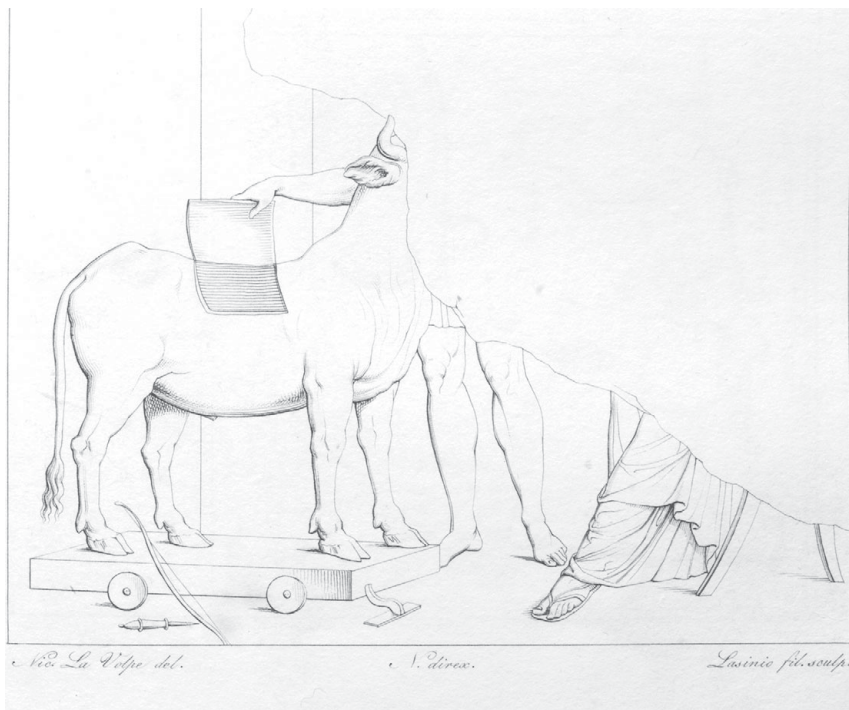


(b)



(a)

Figure 4.30 Arrangement of the paintings in the atrium of the House of Meleager, Pompeii. a: Thetis in the workshop of Hephaestus (Naples 9528); b: Dido (Naples 8898); c: Pasiphae; d: Apollo (Naples 9543).



(c)



(d)

Figure 4.30 (cont.)

This was placed just to the left of the entrance to the peristyle and would have drawn the attention of the visitor to the house. The composition is similar to that of the painting in the House of the Gilded Cupids, though as is common with Fourth-Style paintings it focusses more closely on the figures with less space given to the background. Thetis sits to the right, with her right hand to her chin, looking at Hephaestus as he displays to her the shield he has made for Achilles. Other pieces of armour lie on the floor of the workshop. Further along the same wall, on the other side of the doorway to the peristyle, another panel represented a group of four female figures (fig. 4.30, b).¹²¹ The central figure sits on an elaborate throne with two attendants beside her, one holding a fan above her head, the other holding an elephant's tusk. To the right another woman stands leaning against a short column wearing an elephant's headdress on her head, suggesting that she is a personification of Africa. The painting was earlier seen as showing the personifications of Africa, Asia and Europe, but this does not fit well with the dominance of the seated figure, towards whom all the others look. Instead she probably represents the Carthaginian queen Dido, after her abandonment by Aeneas, whose ship appears in the view through the open window.¹²²

Opposite this painting, on the southern side of the atrium, was a fragmentary painting now known only through drawings (fig. 4.30, c).¹²³ It showed Pasiphae in Daedalus' workshop. The Cretan queen sat at the right of the image, while Daedalus stood in front of her displaying the wooden cow, which stood on a wheeled platform. In the arrangement of the figures and the general theme, it is closely related to the painting of Thetis and Hephaestus that was displayed diagonally opposite. Both show scenes of women in craftsmen's workshops, but while Thetis' visit is occasioned by her desire to protect her son, Pasiphae's is to satisfy her own perverted lusts. The paintings themselves do not dwell on the events behind these scenes, but the compositional parallels prompt us to compare them, and delve further into the narrative background.¹²⁴

The fourth painting was placed opposite that of Thetis and Hephaestus but has compositional parallels with that of Dido, diagonally opposite. As

¹²¹ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 8898.

¹²² See Lorenz 2008: 122–4 on paintings of this type.

¹²³ Real Museo Borbonico 7: pl. 55, reproduced in *PPM* 4: 678, fig. 44.

¹²⁴ Lorenz 2008: 332–5 sees the stress as being primarily on male roles, especially men as craftsmen and in the world of *negotium*, but the evidence of readings of images that we find in literature also suggests that one response, at least, was to discuss the myth lying behind the image.

there, a figure is shown seated on an elaborately carved throne, surrounded by attendants (fig. 4.30, d).¹²⁵ Here, however, the figure is male, dressed in a transparent garment and holding a lyre. To the right appears a seated female figure, also in diaphanous drapery, which slips off her shoulder. She looks at the man before her and grasps the neck of her dress in a seductive gesture. The overall suggestion is of erotic repose. Identifying the figures has proven difficult, however. The presence of the lyre suggests that the male figure is Apollo; the identity of the woman is unclear but she may represent one of his mythological lovers.¹²⁶

The paintings are arranged with clear diagonal compositional links, prompting one to compare and contrast them. The scene of Thetis at the northwest links with that of Pasiphae; in both a woman sits on the right while a craftsman presents her with the fruits of his labour. Yet this compositional parallel also prompts us to consider their very different motivations. While Thetis' visit to Hephaestus' forge is occasioned by motherly love, Pasiphae's visit to Daedalus is the result of immoral lust. These contrasting images of virtuous and immoral women suggest polarised models to follow or avoid.

The other two images in the atrium can also be linked compositionally. At the northeast sits Dido on her elaborate throne. The boat at the top suggests that of the departing Aeneas, explaining the queen's pensive air. This, however, is a far cry from the suicidal Dido of the *Aeneid*. Her representation in the guise of a Roman matron seems to rewrite the myth, arguing that she would have better reacted with resignation, accepting Aeneas' duty to *pietas*. In the opposite corner appears another enthroned figure, this time male and holding a lyre; the overall impression is of *otium* and indulgence in the delights of the senses.

This collection of four images presents us with a series of contrasting roles for men and women. The female figures here appear as loving mother (Thetis), resigned pseudo-wife (Dido, whose presentation on a throne asserts her high status), lustful lover (Pasiphae) and attentive companion. A variety of roles is also suggested for the male figures, the strong workmanlike figures of Hephaestus and Daedalus contrasting with the luxurious pose of the man with the lyre. The two facing paintings of Hephaestus and man with a lyre, in particular, suggest a contrast

¹²⁵ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9543.

¹²⁶ For discussion of the subject see Hodske 2007: 267, who suggests that readings of the central figure as either Paris or a hermaphrodite are both unconvincing.

between *otium* and *negotium*.¹²⁷ While the one man holds a lyre, the god Hephaestus holds armour. The paintings represent the contrasting values of *otium*, love and musical skill on the one hand, and military prowess on the other. The other two paintings also contrast across the room – the sober matronly portrayal of the abandoned Dido, here apparently shown stoically accepting her fate, contrasting with the lustful contrivances of Pasiphae.

Both male and female roles seem to be represented here, though it is less clear which we are being encouraged to follow. Traditional Roman morals would seem to elevate the left-hand virtues of *virtus*, motherly love and stoic endurance over sensual pleasures, but the presentation of the man with a lyre also seems to undermine this. Here the figure is seated on a lavish throne, linking him with the image of Dido, diagonally opposite. While the figures of Hephaestus and Daedalus appear as workmen, dressed in short tunics, he is a figure of wealth and luxury, surrounded by attendants. Lorenz has stressed the way that the presentation of Dido suggests the *matrona* of the house, while the ship and elephant tusk allude to the wealth and prosperity that can come from trade.¹²⁸ Thus Dido here might stand for the *matrona* who presides over the house while her husband attends to business elsewhere. If so, could the lyre-player represent a new type of *dominus*, setting aside the toil and trade alluded to in the other three images in favour of the enjoyment of his wealth back home? While the normative values of piety and loyalty seem to be reasserted here as the correct values for women to aspire to, those of men are perhaps more open to debate.

The erotic languor introduced in the painting of the man with a lyre is continued within the images of the tablinum (8), on the eastern side of the atrium. Although the colour scheme of this room differs from that of the atrium, when open it would have formed part of the same visual space and thus the mythological paintings would probably have been seen in relation to those in the atrium. On the north wall, a painting of Argos and Io continues some of the features of the painting of Dido that lay closest to it in the atrium (fig. 4.31).¹²⁹ Like the personification of Africa, the girl here too wears animal horns, though here they are those of a cow and identify her as Io. When one remembers that Io wandered to Egypt and became identified with the goddess Isis, there is also a regional link

¹²⁷ See Lorenz 2008: 334–5.

¹²⁸ Lorenz 2008: 336. ¹²⁹ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9556.

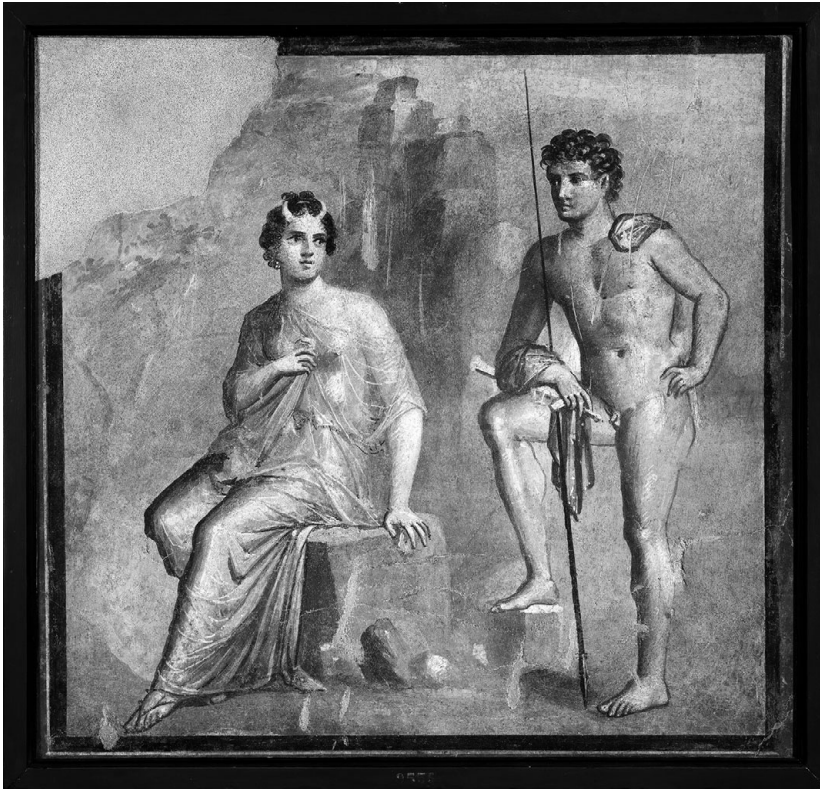


Figure 4.31 Wall-painting of Io and Argos from the tablinum of the House of Meleager, Pompeii. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9556.

between the two paintings, both suggesting the landscape of northern Africa.

The male figure is Argos, sent to guard the girl by the jealous Hera. The painting has a distinctly erotic tone. Set into a diffuse landscape, the concentration is firmly on the interaction of the two figures. Io sits with her back towards Argos but turning her head and shoulders in his direction, while he looks at her; the sense is one of erotic potential, a relationship which has not yet begun, but soon will do. In the painting on the opposite wall we are presented with a more established pair of lovers, Aphrodite and Ares (fig. 4.32).¹³⁰ The goddess reveals her body in an erotic pose, while Ares cups her right breast in his hand. Two Erotes flank them, one holding Ares' helmet while the other brings Aphrodite's jewellery box. Unlike Io,

¹³⁰ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9256.



Figure 4.32 Wall-painting of Aphrodite and Ares from the tablinum of the House of Meleager, Pompeii. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9256.

the goddess here is confident in her sexuality, revelling in her beauty. This painting also has echoes of the unidentified couple in the atrium, evoking the same sense of luxury, eroticism and beauty.

While the paintings of the tablinum can be seen as a pair – two scenes of couples in varying stages of a relationship – there are also resonances set up with the decoration of the atrium that would have been seen by those visiting the house, perhaps during the *salutatio* as they first viewed the paintings of the atrium while waiting, and then entered the tablinum to be received by the master of the house. The display of large-scale mythological paintings set within a luxuriously painted framework and topped, in the tablinum, with elaborately painted stucco would have evoked details of public architecture such as that found in the porticoes of public temples. As there, the paintings could be appreciated individually, or looked at as a collection, providing a talking point for visitors to the house while waiting to be received. Through their compositional parallels these images also

invite us to consider the values and activities they represent, opening up a space for debate around social norms and identities.

The three small rooms lying to the south of the atrium were also decorated with figural paintings, but here the panels were much smaller (between 30 and 40 cm wide and slightly more in height). Nearly all have an erotic, enclosed atmosphere. In room 12 the left wall was decorated with a painting of the youthful Ganymede, his naked body displayed to the viewer, with Eros leading on Zeus' eagle from the top right.¹³¹ The painting from the back wall is lost, but that opposite showed another erotic scene of a half-naked couple, reclining on a couch with a table in front.¹³² There does not seem to be a particular mythological interpretation to this image, but rather it is linked with that of Ganymede through its stress on sensuality and bodily delights.

The neighbouring room, 13, paired a painting of a hermaphrodite revealing himself to Pan with a painting of a draped woman seated on a chair before whom an Eros opens a box.¹³³ It suggests the toilette of a real woman, though the presence of the Eros adds a mythological, erotic tone. The third room, 14, had a scene of Leda embracing the swan on the right wall, and Heracles with the baby Telephus on the left.¹³⁴ No drawings of the painting from the back wall survive, but Fiorelli describes it as showing Venus fishing.¹³⁵

All these paintings are relatively small and focus on the figures themselves rather than their environments. While some mythological episodes are depicted, such as Ganymede and Leda's encounters with Zeus in his various forms, their combination with non-mythological figures such as a couple or seated female, and with idyllic scenes that represent figures from the world of myth but in no known narrative episode, such as the hermaphrodite, takes the focus away from narrative and instead puts it on the display of beautiful naked bodies in timeless settings.¹³⁶ While the scenes of the couple and the draped woman may have evoked everyday activities within the house, the other images project these into the timeless realm of myth, encouraging a sense of luxury, erotic delight and

¹³¹ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9547.

¹³² Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9254.

¹³³ Hermaphrodite: Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9264; Woman: known only in a drawing, reproduced in *PPM* 4: 693, fig. 66.

¹³⁴ Both lost: see *PPM* 4: 695–7, figs. 70, 73 for drawings.

¹³⁵ Fiorelli 1862: 130. Cf. Helbig 1868: no. 355.

¹³⁶ See Hodske 2007: 55–7 on this as a feature of the Fourth Style.

indulgence. This fits with the intimacy of these small rooms, marking them out as spaces for relaxation rather than serious pursuits.

The paintings in and around the peristyle, in the northern half of the house, continue this display of both large- and small-scale mythological paintings with a variety of different themes. Large-scale paintings are found in the reception rooms around the peristyle. In particular, room 27 is a large reception room grandly decorated in a red and black scheme with panel paintings set at the centre of each wall, though that from the eastern wall was already lost at the time of excavation.¹³⁷ In the centre of the back wall is a scene of the Judgement of Paris (fig. 4.33). The hero sits at the left, naked but for a cloak, boots and his Phrygian cap. The figure of Hermes stands behind him pointing at the three goddesses, Aphrodite's victory already assured by her prominent position directly in front of Paris. The left wall probably presented another scene from the life of Paris. Here a male figure, draped in oriental costume, stands at the right, while a woman standing in front of him offers him a helmet. They have been identified as Helen arming Paris. To the left a seated male figure, naked except for a chlamys over his shoulder, may represent Paris' brother, Hector. If the identification is correct, the two paintings both show scenes from the history of the Trojan War, and we might expect another to have appeared on the right wall. The overall tone is that of epic, Paris' choice of Aphrodite setting off an unstoppable series of events and necessitating his own change from pastoral shepherd to warrior. The heightened tone of the paintings suits their display in a reception room, a place for the self-representation of the master of the house and where educated conversation at dinner might revolve around the guests' knowledge of their Homer and Vergil.¹³⁸

The painting on the back wall of the lavish oecus 24 also seems to have celebrated a heroic exploit.¹³⁹ Though now badly damaged, it originally showed Theseus and Ariadne with the defeated Minotaur. The right wall, however, takes us into a world of Dionysiac revelry, which is continued elsewhere around the peristyle. It shows a maenad startled by a youth with a snake. The neighbouring room 26 also evoked the Dionysiac and pastoral realm in its central painting. This showed a seated satyr with a young boy

¹³⁷ PPM 4: 765–88.

¹³⁸ E.g. as satirised in Petronius, *Satyricon* 59. On the emphases of myths in reception rooms around the peristyle see Lorenz 2008: 344–53 on this house and, more generally, 361–79. I broadly accept her analysis, though I would also stress the opportunities for discussion and the display of *paideia* that mythological images provided.

¹³⁹ PPM 4: 728–33, figs. 139, 147.



Figure 4.33 Wall-painting of the Judgement of Paris. Pompeii, House of Meleager, room 27.

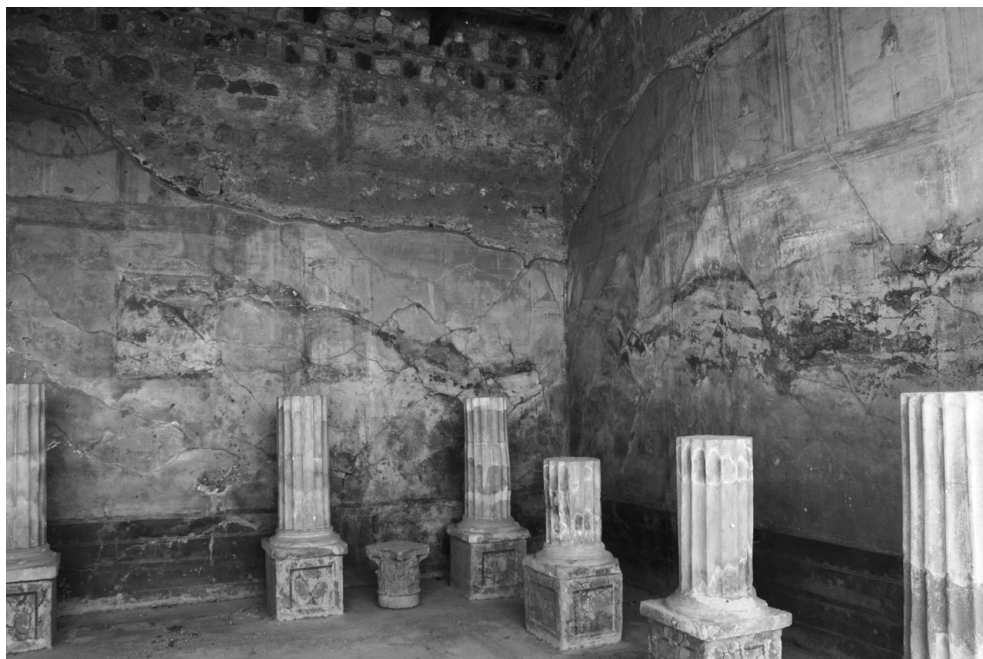


Figure 4.34 View of room 24, Pompeii, House of Meleager.

holding a flute, probably to be identified as Marsyas and Olympus. The paintings in rooms 24 and 26 fall between those of the triclinium, 27, and the peristyle in size, being around 65 cm wide and 70–80 cm high. They are an important part of the decoration, but do not dominate in the same way that the panels of the atrium, tablinum and room 27 would have done. Indeed, in oecus 24 the paintings are placed behind the columns, and that on the side wall is actually obscured by a column; thus they seem designed for those wandering around the room and perhaps served to make this space seem a continuation of the porticoes of the peristyle, rather than being a focal point for activity within the room (fig. 4.34).

The peristyle itself was lavishly decorated with a series of small mythological panels set into the walls of the north and western porticoes (fig. 4.35). These figural paintings were set into white-ground panels divided by architectural features reminiscent of a *scaenae frons*, and set above a socle decorated alternately with Nereids riding sea-monsters and plants. Some of the mythological panels in the peristyle were left *in situ*, and are now mostly illegible. The rest were removed; some can be identified in the collections of the Museo Nazionale in Naples, while for the



Figure 4.35 View of the peristyle in the House of Meleager, Pompeii. The gaps where the paintings were removed can be seen to the left of the picture.

others we have only the descriptions of their subjects given by Bechi, Fiorelli and Overbeck.¹⁴⁰

Those left *in situ* in the portico represented the following scenes.¹⁴¹ On the north wall were shown Aphrodite taking jewellery from a box held by Eros,¹⁴² Silenus reclining in a landscape,¹⁴³ a seated Narcissus,¹⁴⁴ and a scene of Dionysus offering grapes to a child.¹⁴⁵ The west wall showed a figure of Silenus holding up a child who reaches towards a bunch of grapes offered by a woman standing behind him.¹⁴⁶ The other paintings cannot be located with certainty because the accounts differ in the order in which they give them, but they included a number of panels now housed in the museum at Naples: a painting of Aphrodite and the wounded

¹⁴⁰ Bechi 1831: 10–11; Fiorelli 1862: 230–40; Overbeck 1884: 311.

¹⁴¹ As described by Overbeck 1884: 311.

¹⁴² Helbig 1868: no. 303. Drawing: Real Museo Borbonico 8: pl. 6; *PPM* 4: 713, fig. 103.

¹⁴³ Helbig 1868: no. 419. Drawing: Real Museo Borbonico 12: pl. 35; *PPM* 4: 712, fig. 102.

¹⁴⁴ Helbig 1868: no. 1344.

¹⁴⁵ Helbig 1868: no. 401. Drawing: Real Museo Borbonico 11: pl. 51; *PPM* 4: 711, fig. 101.

¹⁴⁶ Helbig 1868: no. 377. Drawing: Real Museo Borbonico 10: pl. 25; *PPM* 4: 716, fig. 112.

Adonis,¹⁴⁷ the abandoned Ariadne,¹⁴⁸ Thetis riding a sea-monster and carrying the arms of Achilles,¹⁴⁹ a male figure with torch and crown, possibly Hymenaeus,¹⁵⁰ and a scene of Silenus watching Pan and Eros wrestling.¹⁵¹ A painting of Apollo and Daphne in Naples may also have come from here.¹⁵² Other scenes attested by the sources but not firmly identified in the surviving paintings consisted of a representation of Perseus and Andromeda looking at the head of Medusa in a pool,¹⁵³ and a satyr with a child playing the syrinx.¹⁵⁴ The reports also mention images of a satyr and a maenad: Bechi describes a painting of a satyr looking at a sleeping nymph, Fiorelli mentions a bacchant discovered by a faun and Overbeck a satyr and a maiden.¹⁵⁵ Mau identifies Overbeck's painting with one of a bacchant holding a tympanon and a satyr who grasps her dress in Naples, but it makes more sense to assume that Overbeck too was referring to an image of a satyr discovering a sleeping maenad. In addition, Bechi also mentions an image of a woman, possibly Helen, though none of the other sources refer to this painting.¹⁵⁶

As a whole, the paintings from the peristyle combine specific mythological narratives such as the stories of Andromeda, Ariadne, Narcissus and Adonis with more general scenes of the Dionysiac realm. Even in the mythological episodes, however, the stress is on the presentation of beautiful naked bodies in landscape settings. As a whole, then, the paintings evoke the worlds of Dionysus and Aphrodite, who both also appeared in the paintings. The placement of the images at eye level along the length of the porticoes evokes the sorts of displays that are attested in public porticoes, while the small size of the images meant that they were best appreciated individually in a serial manner, rather than at one glance. Viewers could wander along the porticoes, appreciating the different tones of the individual paintings – playful, erotic, celebratory or, as in the case of Ariadne, tinged with sadness – and after taking in the ensemble as

¹⁴⁷ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9255.

¹⁴⁸ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9051.

¹⁴⁹ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 8873.

¹⁵⁰ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9320.

¹⁵¹ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9142.

¹⁵² Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 9534; Helbig 1868: no. 214; see *PPM* 4: 720, caption to fig. 118 on possible links with the paintings described by Fiorelli.

¹⁵³ Helbig 1868: no. 1202 suggests it could be one in Naples.

¹⁵⁴ Helbig 1868: no. 441. Drawing: Real Museo Borbonico 10: pl. 42; *PPM* 4: 720, fig. 119.

¹⁵⁵ Bechi 1831: 11; Fiorelli 1862: 240; Overbeck 1884: 311, identified by Mau as Helbig 1868: no. 545.

¹⁵⁶ Bechi 1831: 10.

a whole would be left with a sense of an invitation into a mythological realm. Some of the paintings, such as the figures of Thetis on the sea-monster, or the naked figures of Narcissus and Hymenaeus, also invited an erotic appreciation, leading viewers to linger over these images of beautiful bodies, while the evident erotic excitement of Pan and perhaps the satyr who discovers a maenad offer an invitation to indulge one's natural response to these erotic scenes.¹⁵⁷ The presence of grapes and musical instruments in other paintings alludes to the sensuous delights of music and wine. Overall the collection evokes the public display of panel paintings in porticoes, but through the choice of images clearly also asserts the status of this space as one for *otium* and indulgence in the delights of wine, music and love.

Through their placement and size the paintings in different areas of the house seem to demand different sorts of viewings. Both in the atrium and in the peristyle there is an allusion to public *pinacothecae* but the circumstances of display and the compositional details of the individual paintings also affect how the paintings were seen. The paintings of the atrium seem designed to be seen as a group, with compositional parallels linking the paintings in a chiasmic arrangement. This prompts the viewer to compare the situations presented, in a similar manner to that in the atrium of the House of the Tragic Poet. The paintings of the tablinum can be taken together as a pair, but also continue some of the themes of the atrium and again set up links with them. In the peristyle, however, the paratactic display of small panels along the length of the portico walls prompts the viewer to consider them one after another, rather than taking in the collection as a whole. These scenes of erotic beauty and the sensuous delights of wine or music encourage the suspension of analysis and instead invite a purely aesthetic and emotional response, leading the viewer into the worlds depicted and creating the sense of an atmosphere of love and revelry in this section of the house. The images in rooms 24 and 25, though larger, continue this focus on love and the Dionysiac realm, while those in room 27 return to the more public and intellectual focus of the atrium, inviting interpretation of the mythological scenes and comparison between the panels on the different walls. In all cases there is of course scope for a variety of viewings, for the appreciation of the image on its own and in relation to its neighbours, yet by the focus in the scenes,

¹⁵⁷ Pan is shown as ithyphallic in his contest with Eros and Fiorelli's mention of an 'indecent scene' (1862: 234) might be identical with his bacchant discovered by a faun (1862: 240); see *PPM* 4: 720, caption to fig. 118.

the presence or not of compositional parallels and the size and placement of the images, different sorts of engagement are encouraged. Within this one house there coexist a number of different modes of viewing in which mythological images can act both as gateways to an eroticised world of sensuous delight and as spurs to intellectualised debates about different modes of living.

This analysis of a series of painted ensembles shows that mythological images invited a range of responses that helped to construct the self-image of the patron but also debated and reflected social norms and expectations. The overall visual effect of a collection of mythological paintings alluded to the public world of the *pinacotheca*, raising the status of the space it decorated and marking out the owner as a man of taste, wealth and importance. The paintings themselves could also serve as material for rhetorical displays, allowing host and guests to show off their knowledge of Greek myth, or to debate wider social values, such as the proper roles of men or women, or the perils of love. At the same time, the erotic content of many of the images and the naturalistic style in which they were depicted also invited viewers into the fantasy world they offered, constructing the house as a place of luxury and the imagination.

It is hard to draw firm conclusions about the extent to which uses of mythological images changed over time. Indeed, the comprehensive studies of the Pompeian material undertaken by Lorenz and Hodske reach some different conclusions despite analysing the same material. While both note that over time erotic myths come to dominate the material, Hodske argues for a shift in emphasis from moralising and exemplary images in the Third Style towards a greater focus on erotic and emotional myths in the Fourth Style, whereas Lorenz suggests that this has more to do with the rooms where myths appear than with profound differences in approach.¹⁵⁸ The fact that earlier images are deliberately preserved in some houses also shows that they still had relevance in the later first century AD.¹⁵⁹ In general, however, while *paideia* and fantasy seem to remain important modes of viewing myths throughout the period studied here, the exemplary mode of viewing myth, in which myths are used as a way to think about, challenge or assert social values, seems first to come to the fore in Fourth-Style ensembles such as those in the House of the Tragic Poet or the House of Meleager, and continues on into the second-century

¹⁵⁸ Hodske 2007: esp. 33–68, 135–9; Lorenz 2008: 186–258, 429–30.

¹⁵⁹ See Hodske 2007: 29 for statistics.

display of the Villa Negroni. In the next two chapters we will see how these modes of viewing were taken up in the funerary sphere; here myth becomes especially a way of talking through *exempla* about grief, loss and the virtue of the deceased, while also allowing itself to be read as a spectacular manifestation of cultural *paideia*.

5 | From Home to Tomb: Myths in the Funerary Realm

So far we have looked at the display of myths in the public realm and, in more detail, at representations of myths in domestic contexts, particularly sculptural groups in villas and ensembles of mythological wall-paintings. However, one of the most well-known uses of myth in the Roman visual environment is in the realm of funerary art, particularly on the lavishly decorated marble sarcophagi which began to appear in the Hadrianic period. The emergence of Roman mythological sarcophagi in the second century AD has provoked great scholarly debate, both over the change from cremation to inhumation and over the significance of the images used to decorate these chests.¹ Were they confident statements of belief in the survival of the soul after death, as Cumont thought, or reflections of the cultural predilections of those buried within, as Nock supposed?² More recently, scholarship has moved beyond the prospective/retrospective dichotomy to look instead at the functions such images had as memorials to those buried within and as consolations to the bereaved.³

The messages of mythological sarcophagi will be the subject of the [next chapter](#), in which I use rhetorical, epigraphic and poetic texts from funerary contexts to help to reconstruct contemporary discourses about the dead and to allow the sarcophagi too to speak out. Here, however, I want to put the mythological imagery of the sarcophagi into context by looking at the display of myths in the funerary sphere more generally, considering especially their appearance in the decoration of tombs, as well as on urns and funerary altars. While many of the sarcophagi that survive have been taken out of their original contexts, either by ancient tomb robbers or in more recent excavations, in antiquity they would have been

¹ On the question of inhumation versus cremation see Toynbee 1971: 33–42.

² Cumont 1942; Nock 1946.

³ Koortbojian 1995; Zanker 2000; Zanker and Ewald 2004, 2012. See discussion in [Chapter 6](#), below, with further bibliography.

displayed as part of a decorative complex, including the tomb itself and other physical memorials to the dead.⁴

In particular, my concern here is to explore the extent to which myths displayed in the funerary realm held a particular funerary message while also adopting strategies for viewing and interpreting myths that were drawn from the display of mythological imagery in the domestic sphere. In Nock's rebuttal of Cumont's readings of the mythological imagery on sarcophagi as complex metaphors for the immortality of the soul he repeatedly stresses the overlaps with domestic imagery, asserting that scenes such as those of Dionysus, Eros and Endymion were the 'stock in trade of secular art'.⁵ While Nock allows for mythological imagery an elevating effect, 'a dignified setting which had earlier belonged to the dead of Marathon', imbuing them with 'all the values of classicism', his comparisons to domestic art tend to reduce the significance of the images.⁶ However, as shown in the previous chapters, domestic imagery also played an important role in the creation of a patron's self-image as well as provoking reflection and debate, not least about competing life-styles. In this chapter I explore these overlaps to show that myths displayed in the tomb could engage their viewers in the same sorts of viewing strategies as they did in the home, while also accommodating a specifically funerary message.

Ancient and modern writers both make the link between Roman tombs and the familial *domus*. The tomb as an eternal home reappears in ancient writings as a literary *topos*. In Petronius' *Satyricon* the wealthy freedman Trimalchio lays out clear strictures for the design of his own tomb, asserting 'for it is quite mistaken for the homes of the living to be well cared for, but not to take care of those in which we must live for much longer'.⁷ A little later in the first century, the poet Statius describes the tomb of Priscilla, wife of the imperial freedman Abascantus, as *Domus ista, domus! Quis triste sepulcrum dixerit?*, 'It is a house, a house! Who could call it a sad

⁴ For recent work on reconstructing tomb displays see Meinecke 2012, 2013, 2014 and Borg 2013; see also Herdejürgen 2000; Dresken-Weiland 2003: 98–107, 295–350; Bielfeldt 2003; Kragelund, Moltesen and Østergaard 2003. For useful discussions of funerary architecture and cult see Toynbee 1971 (with updates to bibliography in Rife 1997, a review of the 1996 reprint); von Hesberg and Zanker 1987; von Hesberg 1992; Heinzelmann et al. 2001; Brink and Green 2008; Hope and Huskinson 2011; Carroll and Rempel 2011.

⁵ Nock 1946: 148.

⁶ Nock 1946: 162–3. Cf. p. 166: 'We are left with classicism and culture as a prime factor when we look at these representations.'

⁷ Petronius, *Satyricon* 71.

sepulchre?’⁸ About the time Statius was writing, the emperor Domitian had created the *Templum Gentis Flaviae*, the temple of the Flavian Gens, in the grounds of the house where he himself had been born.⁹ The temple also served as the family’s tomb, reasserting the link between home and tomb.¹⁰ Funerary epitaphs too play upon this link, describing the tomb as an eternal home, *aeterna domus*, and sometimes suggesting that the household will continue to live in it as in life. Thus, an inscription from the Via Salaria in Rome commemorates a boy of 16 years who urges his mother not to grieve and consoles her with the thought that he, she and his sister will live together in the tomb: *hic est nostra domus, hic habitabimus una*, ‘this is our home, here we will live together’.¹¹

Modern scholars have picked up on this *topos*, and looked at the ways in which tombs could evoke the architecture and family structures of a household.¹² Wallace-Hadrill points out that few tombs truly resemble the house in their architectural design, but that their use of art and architecture shows parallel dynamics to those of the Roman house, in particular in their simultaneous address to both external and internal audiences, though the emphasis given to these two audiences changes over time.¹³ Here I want to draw on this parallel by looking specifically at the mythological ensembles which were displayed in some tombs. I will argue that in some cases the display of a series of myths is similar to display patterns in houses, evoking the same variety of interpretation, though in other cases where only one or two myths appear their meaning is more restricted. As with the decoration of the house, the decoration of a tomb is usually conceived as a unity, presumably reflecting the aspirations and ideals of the patron who commissioned it. In some tombs containers for the remains of the dead were also added at the time of construction, as seems likely with the sarcophagi from the Tomba della Medusa outside the Porta Viminalis.¹⁴ Their imagery was thus designed to complement the overall decorative conception. In other cases, however, sarcophagi and ash chests were added over time, and their imagery need not tie in with

⁸ Statius, *Silvae* 5.1.237–8. See Gibson 2006: 75–6 for the identification of Priscilla’s tomb with one near the Church of Domine, Quo Vadis? on the Via Appia.

⁹ Suetonius, *Domitian* 1; Martial, *Epigrams* 9.20.1–2. For discussion see Coarelli 1995; D’Ambra 1993a: 39–41.

¹⁰ Suetonius, *Domitian* 17.

¹¹ *NSc* 1919: 41, a, l. 6. See Lattimore 1942: 165–7 for further examples.

¹² Hope 1997; Wallace-Hadrill 2008b. ¹³ Wallace-Hadrill 2008b: 44–52.

¹⁴ Herdejürgen 1996: 37–53 argues that the sarcophagi must have been placed here soon after construction; the fact that they were left unclamped suggests they were intended to be used repeatedly for subsequent burials. See also Bielfeldt 2003: 143–9.

the surroundings.¹⁵ In both cases, however, memorials to the individual dead could also contribute to the overall image created of the collective family which lay in this resting place.¹⁶ In the rest of this chapter I will look at a few complexes where mythological imagery was chosen to decorate the tomb, considering examples of the use of one or two mythological images as well as those where a more complex programme of imagery was created through an intricate scheme of decoration, whether achieved in paint, stucco, mosaic or marble.

Tracing Myth in the Funerary Sphere

Mythological imagery comes rather late to the funerary sphere, after a widespread impact in the domestic sphere from the Republican period onwards. With the exception of a couple of one-off examples of myths appearing in tombs, cinerary urns or sarcophagi of the Augustan and Tiberian periods, the widespread appearance of myth in funerary art does not start until the later first century AD.¹⁷ It reaches its peak in the second century AD before tailing off in the Severan period. While myths start to appear on cinerary chests, grave altars and in tomb decoration slightly earlier than they do on sarcophagi, the overall picture of their second-century floruit and early third-century decline is common across all examples of funerary art.¹⁸ In their choice of themes and presentation of the myths, however, we also find a great deal of variety between tomb decoration, ash chests and sarcophagi.

Feraudi-Gruénais has analysed the internal decoration of tombs from Rome, and draws a number of conclusions about the popularity of

¹⁵ E.g. the sarcophagi in the Tomb of the Pancratii: Herdejürgen 2000: 224–31; Dresken-Weiland 2003: 313–14, Kat. A55. For discussions of the ways later monuments added to earlier tomb displays see Borg 2013: esp. 9–40, 123–60, 213–40.

¹⁶ See Wallace-Hadrill 2008b: 66–76 on the ways that the decoration of Tomb H in the Vatican Necropolis asserts the familial image desired by its patron, Valerius Herma, not only in the internal decoration as a whole, but also through the inscriptions on individual memorials.

¹⁷ For discussion of myths in these different media see Boschung 1987: 18, 51–3; Sinn 1987: 70–81, esp. 80–1; Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: 170–86. Early representations of myths in tombs include the Columbarium Doria Pamphili, early Augustan (Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: 40–3, K10); and the much-disputed Underground Basilica outside the Porta Maggiore in Rome, which some scholars see as a tomb, usually dated to Tiberius' reign (e.g. Bendinelli 1926), against the view of it as a Pythagorean cultic gathering place (e.g. Carcopino 1926). For discussion and a new reading see North 2012.

¹⁸ On the origins of sarcophagi and overlaps with other forms of funerary decoration see Herdejürgen 1996: 17–36; Davies 2011. Some myths appear on cinerary chests and altars in the first century but the majority fall within the same period as the sarcophagi, often depicting the same myths.

decorative imagery and the themes chosen.¹⁹ The peak for tombs with decorated interiors is the period of the second century into the early Severan period. This is also the peak period for mythological themes in particular, which are most popular in the second half of the second century, when they form the subject matter of 50 per cent of the tombs studied.²⁰ In her analysis of the particular subjects chosen Feraudi-Gruénais categorises them according to whether the theme is more prevalent in funerary or domestic imagery. She notes a greater number of themes common in the domestic sphere, though when discussing the choices made in individual tombs she also notes that funerary themes dominate twelve tombs, while themes common in the domestic sphere, or found in both spheres, decorate only six tombs.²¹ The reason for this apparent discrepancy is that in the twelve tombs she identifies with primarily funerary motifs, two motifs – those of the rape of Persephone and the return of Alcestis from the Underworld – prevail, one or other appearing in nine of these tombs, whereas a wider range of ‘domestic’ themes appears in tombs, but often only once.

In this chapter I explore this issue further, by looking at the choice of themes in a number of tombs. While some seem to have made a deliberate choice to reflect ideas about death and the Underworld, selecting one or two myths that specifically depicted the Underworld, others created more complex iconographic programmes, sometimes incorporating scenes of the Underworld but also combining these with myths lacking a specifically funerary resonance. The overall effect of these programmes is similar to the decorative ensembles found in the domestic sphere, sharing the same variety in the imagery, with individual programmes rarely repeated, and individual selections changing the tone and import of any given ensemble. I will explore here how these more complex extensive ensembles incorporate strategies of display from the domestic sphere to provoke a variety of viewing responses that range from specifically funerary messages to broader claims about the status of the family buried within and their personal and emotional ties.

The Finality of Death? The Tomb as the Underworld

We will start with those myths with a specific funerary message. These include scenes of the Underworld, which assert the funerary nature of the space, as well as myths showing departure to and escape from the

¹⁹ Feraudi-Gruénais 2001. ²⁰ Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: 167.

²¹ Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: 184–6.

Underworld, most notable through the myths of Persephone and Alcestis. In many cases a single mythological theme has been found in a tomb, though it remains possible that other myths were originally included and have since been lost; in other cases we find a series of such images, united by their funerary associations. A couple of early examples are found on ash chests and sarcophagi, such as the so-called 'Underworld sarcophagus' in the Villa Giulia from the reign of Tiberius which is decorated with scenes of the Danaids, Ocnus and Cerberus as well as figures relating to the judgement of the dead.²² A series of scenes from the Underworld were also shown on the stucco decoration of a niche in the Columbarium of Pomponius Hylas, situated near the foot of the stairs leading down into the chamber.²³ This and a neighbouring niche seem to have been added after the main construction of the chamber and the decoration is dated by Mielsch to the Flavian period.²⁴ The frieze is damaged but shows Heracles and Cerberus at the left end, and Ocnus and his donkey on the opposite end. An early report and engraving also suggested that the Danaids might have been shown; the figure of a scantily clad female can be seen just to the left of Ocnus, but no vessel is visible (fig. 5.1).²⁵ Above in the gable is a scene of Achilles and Chiron. While this suggests the education of the deceased, the imagery below asserts the funerary nature of this place, and the finality of the tomb. The use of a scene from the Underworld to define the nature of a space as a tomb can also be seen in Tomb 86 from Isola Sacra. This is one of the earliest tombs of the necropolis, dated to around AD 120.²⁶ The tomb is built on two floors and the lower one was decorated with a mosaic showing a standing man and a seated woman in a boat, probably to be identified with Charon and the deceased, asserting the funerary nature of the space.²⁷

Elsewhere a number of tombs show representations of the myths of Persephone and Alcestis, either alone or in combination with other scenes.²⁸ Both myths are much more popular in funerary than

²² De Nicola 1908; Bastet 1963: 24–5 dates it to Tiberius' reign; see also Keuls 1974: 123–4.

Similar scenes appear on two early Augustan funerary urns: Sinn 1987: cat. 3: Charon and Danaids; cat. 4: winged demons, perhaps Thanatos. Ocnus also appears in the early Augustan Columbarium Doria Pamphili: Fröhlich 2008: 48, fig. 33.

²³ Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: 97–101, K44 gives bibliography.

²⁴ Mielsch 1975: 70, 156, K74.1. ²⁵ Campana 1852: 10, see also pl. 7b.

²⁶ Baldassarre et al. 1996: 74–6, fig. 29. Calza 1940: 164–5 dated the tomb as Hadrianic, but the mosaic to the end of the second century.

²⁷ For a discussion of tomb mosaics in Isola Sacra see Bragantini 1994: esp. 65–6 on this mosaic.

²⁸ Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: 171–2, 183–4 counts five representations of Alcestis with Heracles and six of the rape of Persephone in tombs in Rome, to which can be added other representations from Ostia and Isola Sacra.

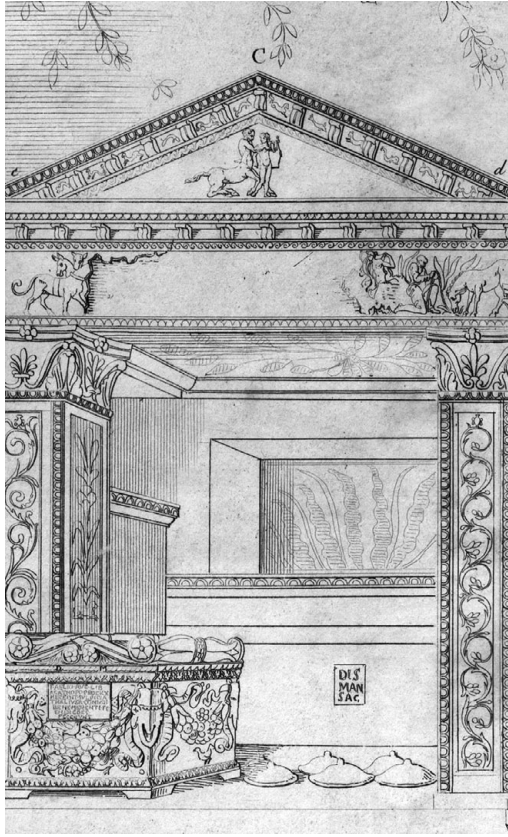


Figure 5.1 Engraving of a niche in the Columbarium of Pomponius Hylas, Rome, showing scenes of the Underworld.

domestic contexts. Imagery of Persephone primarily focusses on her violent abduction as she is carried off on Pluto's chariot. This can be found on mosaics, reliefs and paintings decorating tombs, as well as on ash chests and sarcophagi.²⁹ The resonances of the myth change according to its context. In some cases the abduction of Persephone seems to be chosen as a direct reference to the loss of particular individuals. A fragmentary relief from the Flavian Tomb of the Haterii depicting the rape of Persephone may have served as metaphor for the untimely deaths of two daughters

²⁹ For a comprehensive discussion see Lindner 1984; brief summary in Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: 183–4. The myth appears in Greek art in the fourth-century paintings of a tomb at Vergina, Macedonia. In Italy its earliest appearance is on a lost stucco relief from a tomb at Cumae (Mielsch 1975: 183, A1, provisionally dated to the early Augustan period). In Rome and environs it begins to appear in funerary art in the Flavian period and continues into the fourth century. Its appearance on ash chests and sarcophagi dates to the second to third centuries.

of the house, described elsewhere on the tomb as *virgines raptae*, ‘seized virgins’.³⁰ The link is made more explicit in the fourth-century AD tomb of Vibia on the Via Appia where the painting is inscribed *abreptio Vibies et discensio*, ‘the seizing and passing away of Vibia’.³¹ On a few third-century sarcophagi the link with the deceased is made clear through the addition of portrait features to the face of Persephone; these also put a greater emphasis on the deceased’s personal charm and beauty, through the inclusion of the flower-picking scene in addition to the abduction.³² However, when the abduction alone appears it often seems to express the general speed and horror of death, rather than suggesting a particular parallel to the deceased, as we see when it is used to commemorate the deaths of men or couples on cinerary urns and altars.³³ When used as the decoration for a whole tomb, most notably as a floor mosaic, its primary function was probably similar, to assert the funereal nature of this space, as well as to evoke the extremity of death.

At least five mosaics showing the rape of Persephone are known from tomb complexes in Rome and Ostia.³⁴ The majority of these focus on the actual abduction with Persephone lying prone in Pluto’s arms, although one from a tomb outside the Porta Portuensis showed Pluto’s abduction of Persephone as she picked flowers, with his horses standing nearby (fig. 5.2).³⁵ A mosaic from a columbarium under the Vigna Pia, on the Via Portuensis, gives Greek name labels to Pluto’s horses, stressing their funerary nature: *Chthonios*, *Erebeus*, *Zophios* and *Lygaio*, roughly translating as ‘Chthonic’, ‘of Erebos’ (another name for the Underworld), ‘of the darkness’ and ‘gloomy’.³⁶ The mosaics are a powerful assertion of the funerary nature of the space, and the fate of those buried within, destined like Persephone to descend to the Underworld. In many cases these images probably served as the key element of figural decoration in the tomb, asserting both the expense dedicated to it and its role as the final

³⁰ Wrede 1978; 1981: 298, no. 272.

³¹ Wrede 1981: 300, no. 276; Lindner 1984: 59–60, no. 53. Compare *CIL* VI.7898 (*CE* 1056, line 6) where a young woman says that Pluto snatched her to his infernal realms; see Platt 2011: 359.

³² Robert 1919: nos. 390, 392, 399. See Newby 2011: 219–24; now also Borg 2013: 164–6.

³³ Davies 1986; Boschung 1987: 51; Sinn 1987: 80.

³⁴ Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: K1 (tomb outside Porta Portuensis, mid-second to early third century), K2 (columbarium under Vigna Pia, third century AD), K19 (Vatican Necropolis Tomb I, c. AD 160–170), K50 (Via Cilicia, AD 250–300); Via Ostiense Necropolis, Ostia: Becatti 1961: no. 435. There is also an unprovenanced mosaic previously in the Villa Corsini, Lindner 1984: no. 55, which may come from Rome.

³⁵ Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: K1.

³⁶ Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: K2. *IG* XIV.1303. Werner 1995, II: 246 dates the mosaic to c. 275–300; Lindner 1984: no. 50 puts it earlier.



Figure 5.2 Drawing of a mosaic showing the rape of Persephone, from a tomb outside Porta Portuensis, Rome.

resting place.³⁷ The myth's popularity on floor mosaics, in particular, suggests a parallel between the tomb and the Underworld beneath.³⁸

The myth of Alcestis is another popular choice for tomb decoration in Rome between the mid-second and early third centuries AD.³⁹ At the same period it also appears on a small group of frieze sarcophagi, though in a rather different form.⁴⁰ The sarcophagi place the death of Alcestis and her leave-taking from her family in the centre and usually place her return from the Underworld in the company of Heracles at the far right end. In the tomb imagery, however, the return scene alone is chosen. We have here a good example of the differences between imagery chosen for the tomb as a whole, and that designed to commemorate a particular individual. Relatives (such as the mother of the young woman buried in a sarcophagus in St. Aignan) may have chosen a sarcophagus featuring the myth because it allowed expression of their grief at the loss of a loved one, or (like Euhodus in his commemoration of his wife on a sarcophagus in the Vatican, [fig. 6.1](#) below) because it allowed for the expression of the deceased's wifely virtues.⁴¹ The tomb images concentrate instead on Alcestis' return from the Underworld in the company of Heracles.

³⁷ Only in one case do we know of other mythological imagery, Vatican Tomb I, discussed further below, though in some cases this may be due to the destruction of the rest of the tomb.

³⁸ It also appeared in two tomb paintings in Rome: in the Tomb of the Nasonii and a tomb in the Vigna Amendola, Via Appia: Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: K28, K51.

³⁹ Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: 171–2 includes five representations: K19, K24, K28 (though see further below on the Tomb of the Nasonii), K32, K71. Further on the myth in Roman art see Mucznik 1999.

⁴⁰ Grassinger 1999: 110–28, nos. 75–87.

⁴¹ Grassinger 1999: nos. 75, 76. See further below, pp. 275–6 and 284–7.



Figure 5.3 View of the miniature tomb built into the side of Tomb 3, Via Ostiense Necropolis, Rome.

In some cases the myth appears as part of a wider programme of imagery, as in the two cases discussed further below. In others, it is the only mythological representation in the tomb. This is the case in a small tomb within the Via Ostiense Necropolis near the Basilica of S. Paolo fuori le mura in Rome. Here a miniature tomb was built into the side of a staircase leading to an upper room or terrace above Tomb 3 (fig. 5.3).⁴² It contains a series of niches with spaces for eight cinerary urns, and had space for an inscription above the entrance. Though small, the tomb is lavishly decorated with scenes of peacocks and flowers. The mythological scene is centrally placed between the two rows of niches, clearly visible from the entrance to the tomb (pl. 13). It is presented in the form of a

⁴² Lugli 1919b: 294–300, esp. 295–7. Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: 140, K71 seems to place the painting in the back niche of the main tomb, rather than the side aedicula.

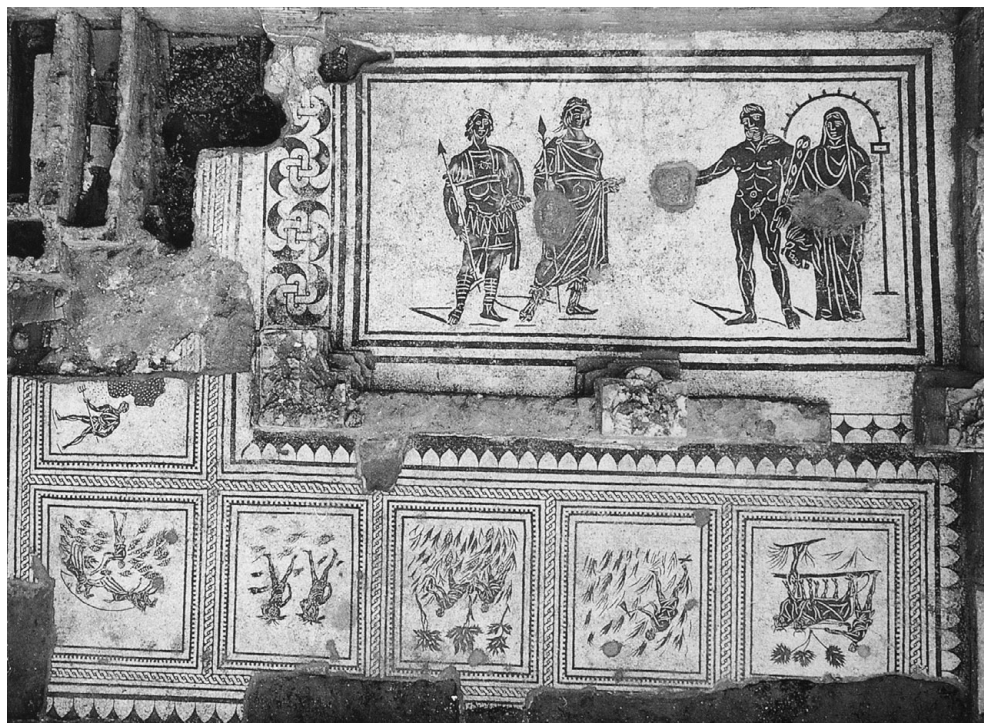


Figure 5.4 Mosaic floor decorating the Tomba della Mietitura, Isola Sacra, showing the myth of Alcestis in the centre.

pinax, with shutters at either side. It shows Heracles, with a yellow cloak over his shoulder and carrying his club, with his right arm around the shoulder of a female figure wearing a purple dress and yellow mantle. The remains of an arch can be seen behind the woman, identifying her as Alcestis emerging from the Underworld. Archways and doorways appear elsewhere in funerary art as the entrance to the Underworld, evoking the idea of the threshold between life and death.⁴³ In images of Alcestis, we find them also on the great Velletri sarcophagus (discussed below), and in a mosaic from Isola Sacra.

This is a large and lavish mosaic which paved the open area of an enclosure in front of two funerary chambers in the so-called Tomba della Mietitura (fig. 5.4). The covered porticoes around the enclosure were decorated with scenes of agriculture and both sets of mosaics are dated to

⁴³ See Haarløv 1977 and Davies 1978 on the door motif, and especially Platt 2011: 344–9 and 2012 on the liminality of the tomb as represented in funerary art.

the Antonine period.⁴⁴ The central mosaic shows Heracles leading Alcestis out of the Underworld, marked by the archway behind her to the right, and towards the waiting figure of her husband, Admetus, who is accompanied by an attendant.

How should we understand these myths in their funerary context? The representation of the return of Alcestis in tombs seems more positive than the images of her lying on her deathbed which take centre stage on the sarcophagi. Yet I am sceptical as to how far we should see these as statements of a confident belief in a life after death. The presence of the archway to Hades in these two tombs asserts the tomb's role as the gateway to the Underworld, the place where relatives deposit the bodies of their loved ones but also go to commune with the dead in festivals such as the *parentalia* and *rosalia*.⁴⁵ The placement of the Isola Sacra mosaic in the courtyard in front of the tomb chambers may have set up a particular resonance with the activities of the bereaved at such festivals. Just as they come to the tomb to remember their dead, and experience a partial reunion with them, so too Alcestis is here shown being reunited with her husband, though the distance between them and the fact that she still stands underneath the gateway may also suggest ideas about the temporary nature of any such union.

This myth conveys with it messages about the emotional tie between a husband and wife that might have influenced the original owner of the tomb to include it in the decoration. While the surrounding mosaics of the cultivation and harvest of grain probably alluded to the tomb owner's profession, the mythological mosaic elevates him through reference to the world of myth, and also defines the funerary nature of this space. While he may have chosen it to tally with his own beliefs or emotional ties and hopes, these did not constrain the myth's more general associations. Indeed, over time, it is the myth's broader funerary associations which seem to have proved the prime attraction. In a later period when the tomb was reused, presumably by a different family, the agricultural mosaics were covered up but the Alcestis mosaic left open to display.⁴⁶ This would suggest that its broader associations with death and the hope of reunion were powerful enough to have resonances for a new patron, as well as for the original owner of the complex.

⁴⁴ Angelucci et al. 1990: 88–109 (Baldassare and Bragantini); Bragantini 1994: 67–9; Baldassarre et al. 1996: 154–61.

⁴⁵ For an overview see Toynbee 1971: 61–4; also Meinecke 2013. ⁴⁶ Bragantini 1994: 68.

Two Funerary Programmes: The Velletri Sarcophagus and Tomb I of the Vatican Necropolis

So far we have looked at how individual myths relating to the Underworld could be represented in tombs as a means to assert the funerary nature of the space. Sometimes these myths appear alone; however, often they formed part of a more complex programme combined with other myths. In this section I examine two programmes of imagery where the myths chosen all have a primarily funerary resonance, before looking later at some examples of programmes where funerary myths were combined with other myths that are also found in the domestic realm. In both cases, these combinations of images have parallels with the sorts of visual programmes we have seen in the house, employing some of the same strategies in their formal and thematic combinations; they are therefore likely to have evoked the same wide range of responses. At the same time, the fact that the context of viewing was firmly set in the funerary realm must also have conditioned patrons and viewers to look particularly for funerary meanings. Thus both funerary myths (myths dealing with death and the Underworld) and non-funerary myths (e.g. scenes of Dionysiac revelry, or various mythological love stories) could have had a specifically funerary resonance. In some cases, however, where the imagery is primarily composed of non-funerary myths, as in the Tomb of the Pancrattii (discussed below), a key reference may have been to the world of the house and the *paideia* of the patron, rather than to the specific context of the tomb.

The Velletri Sarcophagus

First, I will look at the combination of funerary myths in two separate contexts, on a sarcophagus and in a tomb. In general, I have chosen to discuss sarcophagi in the [next chapter](#) since they primarily represent the commemoration of individuals or couples, rather than a family as a whole. The Velletri sarcophagus, however, is something of a special case ([figs. 5.5–5.8](#)).⁴⁷ Its size, architectonic form and iconographical programme liken it to a tomb in miniature and it seems likely that it was

⁴⁷ For discussions see Bartoccini 1958; Andrae 1963: 11–87; Lawrence 1965; Keuls 1974: 129–38; Haarløv 1977: 26–30; Bonanno Aravantinos 2005 (with a useful annotated bibliography of the scholarship on the sarcophagus at 55–6); Thomas 2011: 403–8.

always intended to serve as the receptacle for multiple burials.⁴⁸ The sarcophagus' monumentality puts it closer to Attic or Asiatic sarcophagi than to the rest of Roman production, though the style of its reliefs does suggest a local workshop and a date in the Hadrianic period.⁴⁹ The sarcophagus as a whole evokes the form of a building, with a gabled roof strewn with garlands, and an architectural framework surrounding the decoration of all four sides.⁵⁰ The reliefs of the front refer to the world of the Dead (fig. 5.5). In the upper register Pluto and Persephone sit enthroned, flanked by the gods Zeus and Poseidon. Further out are two scenes around half-open doors. To the left Hermes leads out Protesilaus, to be briefly reunited with his wife Laodameia, who waits behind the door. On the right a parallel scene shows Heracles and Alcestis, with Admetus behind the door. In the lower register is shown the rape of Persephone, carried off on Pluto's chariot in the centre while to the left her mother Demeter searches for her and her companions mourn her loss.

On the back long side the upper register is occupied by scenes of the labours of Heracles, which continue round also onto the two short sides (fig. 5.6). The lower register shows scenes of life in the Underworld. In individual scenes separated by figures of Atlas are (left to right) two women picking fruit from a tree, the punishment of Sisyphus, Charon's boat, the punishment of Tantalus and the Danaids. On the short sides the lower register is occupied by a sacrifice scene on one, and a pastoral scene on the other. In the centre of the upper register of the left short side Heracles appears, bringing Cerberus out of the Underworld. The corresponding position on the right short side also shows a doorway, this time opening into the tomb with two figures outside (fig. 5.7). The youthful one seems about to enter, after handing a *patera* to an older bearded figure who stretches out his hand to receive it. Keuls follows Andreae in reading this as the *katabasis* of Heracles, while Bartoccini and Lawrence suggest that it might be the deceased himself, entering the tomb and taking his leave of a relative.⁵¹ The latter suggestion seems more convincing to me, since

⁴⁸ Borg 2013: 203–6 suggests that a number of sarcophagi were designed for multiple burials, though Birk 2013: 22–31 is more cautious, noting that not all sarcophagi which show the names or portraits of man and wife necessarily held the remains of both. See also Galinier 2013: 99–101 for some examples of inscriptions naming the inhabitants of sarcophagi.

⁴⁹ Bartoccini 1958: 196–203 dated it to AD 190–193, but Andreae 1963: 15–26 argues persuasively for a Hadrianic date. Lawrence 1965: 207–9, 221–2 finally opts for a late second-century date but her comments on the portrait of the deceased on the right end (214, 221) liken it to pre-Hadrianic portrait styles.

⁵⁰ Thomas 2011: 404–5.

⁵¹ Andreae 1963: 53–6; Keuls 1974: 134. Bartoccini 1958: 172; Lawrence 1965: 213–14.



Figure 5.5 The Velletri sarcophagus, front. Velletri, Museo Civico.



Figure 5.6 The Velletri sarcophagus, back. Velletri, Museo Civico.



Figure 5.7 The Velletri sarcophagus, right short side. Velletri, Museo Civico.

the figure's face resembles a portrait, clean-shaven and with hair brushed forward.⁵² However, he is also clad in heroic costume, nude apart from a chlamys, rather than in typical Roman dress. This distinguishes him from

⁵² Bieber 1966 identifies the owner as a member of the Octaviani family from Velletri (as attested in Suetonius, *Augustus* 1–6), but this seems too tenuous. See Caldelli 2005 for some other possibilities, based on the likelihood that the sarcophagus was originally displayed in an elite villa in the environs of Velletri.

Heracles, who is shown either naked or wearing the lionskin, but adds a heroising edge to the image of the deceased, lifting him out of the earthly realm.

The two open doors, placed at either end of the sarcophagus, one opening inwards, the other outwards, identify the sarcophagus with the Underworld itself, into which the deceased is going and out of which he might, like Heracles, Alcestis and Protesilaus, at least hope to exit.⁵³ The rest of the imagery asserts the power of that sphere, towards which Persephone is dragged to become, above, queen of the dead, and in which both punishment and reward can take place (the women around the tree may represent the Gardens of the Hesperides, or more generally the Isles of the Blest).⁵⁴ The labours of Heracles suggest the toil of mortal life. Heracles was able to escape Hades and the deceased might have hoped that these scenes served to glorify his own toils and suggest his worthiness too. In general, however, the imagery seems more descriptive than hopeful. It presents the world of the Underworld, out of which a few lucky people can emerge, but in which others also find their just deserts.⁵⁵

The sarcophagus eventually served to contain numerous burials, all the result of reuse. While the vicissitudes of the sarcophagus over the centuries make knowledge of its original inhabitants impossible, it seems likely that it was always planned to contain a number of members of a family.⁵⁶ Lawrence suggests that in addition to the portrait head on the figure entering the tomb at the right end, more portraits can be seen on the heads of Alcestis and Admetus, and on the boyish charioteers in the front lower register.⁵⁷ With faces on such a small scale it is very difficult to be sure whether portraits were intended or not. While the charioteers do not look particularly like portraits to my eyes, the faces of Alcestis and Admetus do seem to have different proportions to the more idealised faces of the other figures, and a more distinct physiognomy (fig. 5.8). The head of Protesilaus also shows plump, rather fleshy features, suggesting

⁵³ On the permeability of sarcophagi, and the ways that the forms and decoration of sarcophagi reflect on their function as containers, see Elsner 2012 and Platt 2012: esp. 223–4 on this sarcophagus; on the motif see Haarlov 1977; Davies 1978.

⁵⁴ See Candilio 2005: 94–5 for analysis of this scene.

⁵⁵ Andrae 1963: esp. 79–87 reads the imagery as a more confident allegory of immortality; see also Galli 2005.

⁵⁶ When discovered the sarcophagus contained the skeletons of seven adults and two children, but analysis of these suggests that they date from the twelfth century onwards, and an instrument found inside also shows it was robbed in the nineteenth century: Bartoccini 1958: 132; Rubini 1989.

⁵⁷ Lawrence 1965: 211, 213–14, figs. 10, 22, 23.

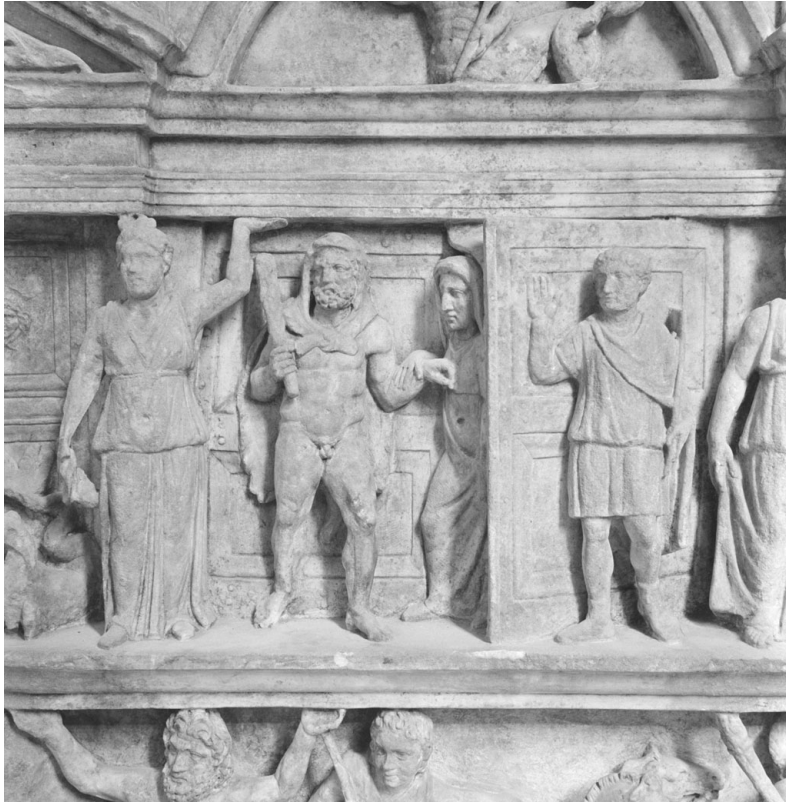


Figure 5.8 The Velletri sarcophagus, detail of front showing Heracles, Alcestis and Admetus. Velletri, Museo Civico.

a degree of individualisation, though unfortunately Laodameia's face is too worn to tell.⁵⁸ The overall decorative scheme does not, however, draw particular attention to these figures as portraits. The intention may have been to differentiate the mythological figures as individuals, prompting viewers to see their experiences as metaphors for the hoped-for reunion of the bereaved with their loved ones, rather than to present portraits of specific Roman individuals.

In its form and decoration the sarcophagus evokes a tomb in miniature, in which one would expect to find the burials of more than one person. It is therefore fitting that the message of the sarcophagus should be adaptable to all those contained within, with the imagery addressing itself to both

⁵⁸ Personal observation. For discussion of portraits on mythological frieze sarcophagi see Newby 2011.

male and female inhabitants. The labours of Heracles and the youthful male entering the tomb on the short side suggest an allusion to male virtues, while the rape of Persephone could also serve as a metaphor for the death of a woman. Both male and female figures are shown emerging from the Underworld, on the front, and as completing their assigned roles in the afterlife on the back. The series of mythological vignettes acts as a programme of funerary motifs, offering examples of differing fates after death and allowing for a variety of potential inhabitants.

We do not know how the sarcophagus was originally displayed. It had been broken into by tomb robbers and was found in a vineyard around four miles from Velletri. It had probably been removed from its original place of display, which may have been in an elite villa nearby.⁵⁹ Whether displayed in the open air, or perhaps in the centre of an enclosing tomb, like the plain monumental sarcophagus in the centre of the Tomb of the Pancratii on the Via Latina, its imagery was designed to be read from all around, evoking the architecture of a tomb building and portraying itself as the resting place for an entire family.⁶⁰

Andreae's stylistic analysis has convincingly refuted the late second-century date initially proposed by Bartoccini, and suggested instead a date in the Trajanic or Hadrianic period. While Andreae ultimately chose a late Hadrianic date, he also noted similarities to the allegorical programme of Trajan's Arch at Beneventum, some twenty years earlier.⁶¹ The clean-shaven portrait of the man on the right side, whose entrance into the tomb makes it highly likely that he was to be seen as one of its inhabitants, might also suggest a date before the widespread adoption of Hadrian's beard, though private portrait styles did not always slavishly follow those of the imperial house.⁶² Overall, while a precise date cannot be given, the evidence seems to point towards this being one of the earliest sarcophagi to be produced in the second century, perhaps in the Hadrianic period. Its originality in form and content would suit a date at the start of widespread sarcophagus production, before the types that were to become standard later on became fully established.⁶³ It is probably roughly contemporary

⁵⁹ Caldelli 2005. On funerary monuments in villas see Bodel 1997: 18–26.

⁶⁰ External displays of sarcophagi seem more common in the third century AD, as suggested by Borg 2013: 43–7, though it remains possible that earlier sarcophagi were also displayed in this way.

⁶¹ Andreae 1963: 25 n. 105.

⁶² See R. R. Smith 1998 for the variety in eastern Greek portrait styles of the second century AD. On Hadrian's beard see Zanker 1995: 198–266.

⁶³ More recent commentators have tended towards a date c. AD 150, e.g. Galli 2005, but without compelling reasons.



Figure 5.9 Mosaic showing the rape of Persephone, pavement of Tomb I, Vatican Necropolis.

with the earliest garland sarcophagi, some of which also combined separate mythological vignettes, though in its concentration on predominantly funerary myths it also has closer resonances with tomb decoration from the Flavian period, such as the stuccoes in the Columbarium of Pomponius Hylas and the relief of Persephone from the Tomb of the Haterii.⁶⁴

Vatican Necropolis, Tomb I

A later example of the combination of funerary myths into a decorative programme can be seen in Tomb I of the Vatican Necropolis. This tomb was paved with a lavish mosaic showing the rape of Persephone (fig. 5.9). Whereas elsewhere such mosaics often appear as the only surviving decoration of a tomb, here the wall-paintings were partially preserved, allowing us to recreate the wider decorative ensemble which seems to employ some of the visual strategies that we also find in domestic ensembles (pl. 14).

⁶⁴ See above, pp. 233–5.



Figure 5.10 Back wall of Tomb I, Vatican Necropolis, showing two figural panels flanking the central niche, the right one of which shows Heracles and Alcestis.

The decoration of the tomb has been dated stylistically to around AD 160.⁶⁵ On the northern back wall of the tomb the central niche was flanked by two figural panels. The one to the right shows Heracles with lionskin and club leading Alcestis by the hand (fig. 5.10, pl. 14). The one to the left is now badly faded. It showed two figures, one seated and turned towards the other who was shown standing to the left. Ferrua identified it as the death of Alcestis, but Mielsch and von Hesberg suggest instead an interpretation as Venus and Adonis, who often appear in this scheme on sarcophagi in the scene where he is about to embark for the fatal hunt.⁶⁶

Two more figural scenes appear on the side walls, in panels facing one another across the width of the tomb. On the left wall the panel to the left of the central niche shows a floating or descending female figure (fig. 5.11), while on the right wall the panel to the right of the central niche shows

⁶⁵ Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: K19. The key publication of the necropolis is Mielsch and von Hesberg 1986–95. See II: 209–21 on this tomb, date discussed at 220–1, with some colour illustrations.

⁶⁶ Ferrua 1947: 222; Mielsch and von Hesberg 1986–95, II: 214.

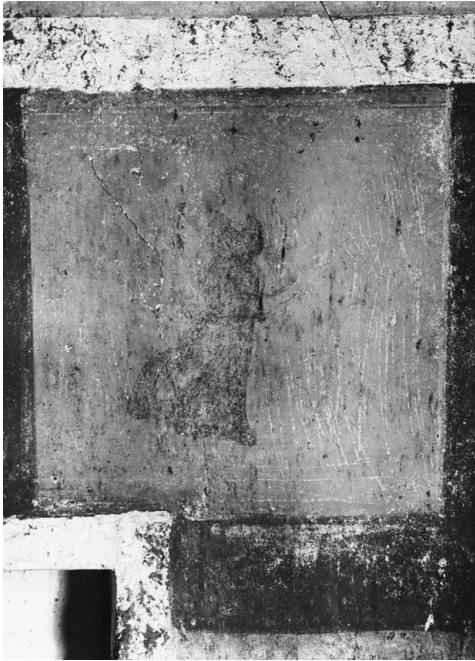


Figure 5.11 (Left) Wall-painting of a floating female figure, from the left-hand wall of Tomb I, Vatican Necropolis.



Figure 5.12 (Right) Wall-painting of a standing male figure, from the right-hand wall of Tomb I, Vatican Necropolis.

a standing naked male figure with chlamys and spear (fig. 5.12). In their current condition it is impossible to identify the figures securely, and it is possible that their interpretation may have remained open in antiquity too. They have been variously identified as a Victory or Hore (Season), and a standing hero, possibly Admetus, or as the two halves of another mythological couple separated through death: Laodameia and Protesilaus.⁶⁷ These two facing figures offered male and female prototypes upon which viewers might have chosen to project a mythological identification. The presence in the tomb of the myth of Alcestis on the back wall and the rape of Persephone on the floor makes a mythological interpretation a likely choice, presenting a series of complementary images of women led through love to their deaths, albeit with differing final results.

We have already seen the three myths of Persephone, Laodameia and Alcestis combined on the front of the Velletri sarcophagus. They also

⁶⁷ Ferrua 1947: 217, 222 (Victoria and Admetus); Andrae 1963: 44 (Laodameia and Protesilaus); Mielsch and von Hesberg 1986–95, II: 214 (Hore and male figure).



Figure 5.13 Sarcophagus front showing the rape of Persephone, Florence, Uffizi inv. 86.

appear together elsewhere, as on a sarcophagus in the Uffizi.⁶⁸ The front of the sarcophagus shows the abduction of Persephone, as she is carried off in Pluto's chariot (fig. 5.13), while the two short sides show couples. On the left Hermes accompanies a draped woman, probably Laodameia on her way to the Underworld to join her husband (fig. 5.14), while on the right Heracles escorts Alcestis back from the Underworld to rejoin Admetus (fig. 5.15).⁶⁹ The archways at the back of each short side suggest the entrance to Hades, towards which Laodameia moves and from which Alcestis is being led. In its combination of three myths the sarcophagus presents three fates for women: violent abduction from the world of the living on the front, combined with entry into and escape from the Underworld on the sides. The presence of divine companions, Hermes and Heracles, on the sides suggests an identification with particular mythological figures, but in their iconography these heavily draped females could also be seen as representative of any deceased woman. The twofold allusions serve to identify her with the virtues of Alcestis and Laodameia, two paragons of wifely devotion, and perhaps too to suggest

⁶⁸ Florence, Uffizi inv. 86. Robert 1919: no. 372 = Grassinger 1999: no. 81.

⁶⁹ Andrae 1963: 37 identifies her as Laodameia, though Heracles is more usually shown with Alcestis. See, however, p. 267 and fig. 5.21 below.



Figure 5.14 Left short side of the sarcophagus shown in [fig. 5.13](#), showing Hermes and Laodameia.

a hope that this devotion will ultimately lead to a reunion with her husband, while the imagery on the front strongly asserts the power of his loss.

Alcestis and Laodameia also appear paired together in a funerary epigraph as mythological paradigms for a loyal and loving wife. A bilingual Greek and Latin inscription from Sardinia marks the grave of a woman named Pomptilla who is said to have prayed to die in place of her husband when he was suffering from an illness. She is specifically compared to the mythological prototypes of Penelope, Laodameia, Evadne and Alcestis, all dutiful and loyal wives.⁷⁰ While individual scenes of Alcestis and Laodameia can appear on sarcophagi, where they are often used to assert the virtues of the deceased and the grief of those left

⁷⁰ IG XIV.607; CIL X.7563/78; Peek 1955: 636–40, no. 2005, l. 22–31.



Figure 5.15 Right short side of the sarcophagus shown in [fig. 5.13](#), showing Heracles and Alcestis.

behind, they can also appear combined, as here, as a series of mythological analogies.⁷¹

While the tone of the imagery in Tomb I is predominantly funerary, the techniques used to create this mythological ensemble bear comparison with domestic programmes, such as those in the House of the Tragic Poet or the House of the Dioscuri discussed in the [last chapter](#). There, too, myths concerning the loves and fates of women were combined to provoke viewers to explore the comparisons and contrasts between them. The myths of Alcestis, Persephone and Laodameia all feature journeys to and from the Underworld and are therefore thematically suited to display in a tomb. If the painting to the left of the central back niche of Tomb I showed Aphrodite and Adonis it would have added to these funerary myths a further example of love and loss, not specifically linked to the Underworld geographically, but also dealing with the death of a loved one (here Adonis) and a popular theme on contemporary sarcophagi.

⁷¹ On Alcestis sarcophagi see pp. 275–6 below. Only two sarcophagi make Laodameia their main focus: Robert 1919: nos. 422 and 423. See Zanker and Ewald 2004: 101–2, figs. 85–6; 374–7, no. 35 = Zanker and Ewald 2012: 94–5; 392–6, no. 32; and Newby 2011: 197–9, with [fig. 6.2](#).

The composition of the paintings is carefully balanced. Two pairs of figures (probably both showing a male and a female figure) on the back wall flank the central aedicula, while another pair is split across the room in the side panels. These also set up chiasmic links across the tomb to the paintings at the back, the standing hero on the right wall (fig. 5.12) echoing the standing figure to the left of the back wall (fig. 5.10, left), while the floating figure on the left wall (fig. 5.11) is matched by the figure of Alcestis, who is also shown in a dark dress and with naked feet (fig. 5.10, right). These two female figures can be read as complementary versions of the loving wife: Laodameia, the wife who pines for her husband and after winning him back for a day chooses to die to join him, here shown in her descent to the Underworld, and Alcestis, the dutiful wife who died to save her husband and was rewarded by being returned from the Underworld by Heracles.

While this interpretation must remain open, such a programme would be in keeping with the use of deferred compositional and thematic links between images in domestic paintings. These are architecturally attested at Pompeii, for example in the House of the Tragic Poet, and are also described in the roughly contemporary text of Lucian's *On the Hall*.⁷² The evidence from both houses and texts attests to a proclivity for seeing and debating connections between images which tomb patrons and those visiting tombs would have experienced in the domestic sphere and thus could carry with them into the tomb. In addition, we have seen how the linking of Alcestis, Persephone and Laodameia can also be seen in other funerary contexts. This tomb thus combines programmatic techniques drawn from the domestic sphere with specifically funerary iconography to achieve a unified decorative programme fitted for the tomb.

Domus ista, domus! Lavish Interiors in Three Roman Tombs

We have already seen how Tomb I utilises techniques of combining mythological images that can also be found in the domestic sphere. In this section I want to explore the allusion to the home in more detail through looking at the decorative programmes of three tombs from the environs of Rome. All are lavishly decorated with stuccoed or painted walls and ceilings and contain a number of mythological images in their display. However, they

⁷² See above, [Chapters 3 and 4](#).

vary in their choices of images, and offer a range of associations and evocations, alluding strongly to the wealth and education of their patrons as well as, in some cases, to the funerary nature of the space they decorate. The tombs under discussion are the Tomb of the Pancratii on the Via Latina from the early to mid-second century; 'la Grotta' on the Via Salaria of roughly the same period; and the late second- or early third-century Tomb of the Nasonii from the Via Flaminia.⁷³

The Tomb of the Pancratii on the Via Latina

The clearest example of the use of a lavish interior evoking those of the domestic sphere is the so-called Tomb of the Pancratii on the Via Latina, excavated in the nineteenth century.⁷⁴ The tomb consists of two chambers, an inner chamber that is lavishly decorated in polychromed stucco, and an outer chamber more simply decorated with paintings.⁷⁵ The inner chamber seems to be the earlier and was built around a large plain stone sarcophagus set into the floor. Internally this was divided lengthwise into two sections and was probably designed to function as the resting place for a married couple.⁷⁶ The stucco decoration has been dated from the Hadrianic to the Antonine periods, but the tomb continued in use well into the third century AD.⁷⁷ At the time of excavation eight sarcophagi were found in the main chamber, several dating to the Severan period, while the outer chamber also contained third-century sarcophagi with inscriptions alluding to the tomb's use by the burial club of the Pancratii, giving the tomb its modern name. It seems likely that the sarcophagi found in the main chamber were originally placed in the outer chamber, but were later moved into the inner room to accommodate the reuse of the outer chamber by the Pancratii.⁷⁸ The sarcophagi include a number with mythological themes, but since these date to the later second and early third centuries they do not reflect the original decorative intention of the tomb, which seems to have comprised of a central plain sarcophagus set into a lavishly stuccoed interior. It is likely that the tomb was first constructed in the early second century AD to serve as a resting place for the owners of the nearby elite villa, who can be identified on the evidence

⁷³ Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: K48, K32 and K28 respectively.

⁷⁴ See the excavation report by Fortunati 1859; for a reappraisal of the sarcophagi found here see Herdejürgen 2000. Borg 2013: 146–50 discusses the third-century use of the tomb.

⁷⁵ Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: K48. ⁷⁶ Herdejürgen 2000: 231–3.

⁷⁷ Mielsch 1975: 90–2, 171–2, K116 dated AD 165–170; Herdejürgen 2000: 233–4.

⁷⁸ Fortunati 1859: 56–61; Herdejürgen 2000: 220–34; Borg 2013: 146–50, 225–6.



Figure 5.16 Tomb of the Pancratii, Via Latina, Rome. Detail of ceiling decoration showing Dionysus and Heracles.

of an inscribed water pipe as the family of C. Valerius Paullinus, consul in AD 107, who died soon before AD 112.⁷⁹

The stuccoed ceiling is one of the most impressive examples of polychrome stucco that survives from ancient Rome and comprises a series of stuccoed panels interspersed with painted landscapes and still lifes (pl. 15). The four lunettes on each wall evoke the decoration of the *scenae frons* and contain separate standing figures. These show the bearded Dionysus, a Victory and Apollo on the back wall; two warriors and a youth on the right wall; Hermes and Dionysus on the entrance wall; and Odysseus, Diomedes and Philoctetes on the left wall.⁸⁰ Despite their belonging to a particular mythological narrative the figures of Odysseus, Diomedes and Philoctetes appear singly, as if on stage, and the narrative element is not stressed.

⁷⁹ CIL XV.7561; Coarelli 1986: 47–8; Baccini Leotardi 2008; Borg 2013: 146. On villa tombs see Bodel 1997: 18–26.

⁸⁰ See Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: figs. 111–18 for illustrations. For descriptions see Ronczewski 1903: 29–30; Wadsworth 1924: pls. 26–35; Mielsch 1975: K115.



Figure 5.17 Tomb of the Pancratii, Via Latina, Rome. Detail of ceiling decoration showing the Judgement of Paris.

In contrast, the ceiling features four frieze panels with representations of individual mythological events. Above the left wall is a scene of Dionysus and a lyre-playing Heracles in the company of Artemis, Athena and a satyr (fig. 5.16). Dionysus and Heracles look towards one another, and the fact that Heracles has put down his club to take up the lyre suggests a contest of musical skills. The other three panels show the Judgement of Paris above the back wall (fig. 5.17); Admetus presenting Pelias with a chariot to which he has yoked a lion and a boar, in his courtship of Alcestis, above the right wall; and Priam ransoming Hector's body above the entrance wall (pl. 15).

The scenes of Paris and Priam both relate to the history of the Trojan War, as do the figures of Odysseus and Diomedes, and can be paralleled elsewhere in Roman art. In addition the Priam scene has an obvious resonance for the funerary context with its underlying concern for proper burial. Yet the other two images are more unusual and do not have an obvious funerary link. Admetus' proposal to Pelias clearly refers to his marriage to Alcestis, but none of the myth's later events are alluded to here. The scene of Dionysus and Heracles places a favourite hero in a new

light, and may allude to the joys of wine and music, but does not seem to refer to a specific myth. The ceiling as a whole is orientated around a central roundel of Jupiter and the eagle, which may have resonances with ideas of apotheosis, as in the scenes of the eagle that appear on imperial reliefs, but nothing else in this tomb demands a specifically funerary interpretation. Instead, in its evocation of a *scenae frons* style of decoration and the combination of mythological scenes with idyllic landscapes and still lives, the decoration seems deliberately designed to evoke the decoration of the domestic sphere.

The combination of images seems somewhat eclectic; while we might see a link in the theme of the Trojan War, the other images cannot be fitted into this and it seems more reasonable to conclude that presenting a unified programmatic message was not the designer's main intention. Instead, he wanted to evoke the same richness of decoration that we can find in the domestic sphere, and the choice of scenes reminiscent of the theatre and epic, along with more abstruse mythological scenes, was probably designed to convey the owner's intellectual *paideia*. This tomb is the clearest example of Nock's claim that mythological images in the funerary sphere carry with them the cachet of classicism and culture.⁸¹ They create a lavish house for the dead of the family that constructed it.

The reuse in the tomb of a decorative scheme similar to those found in the domestic sphere has some parallels with the choice of themes on the garland sarcophagi, which are roughly contemporary.⁸² Here too we find myths that also appear in the domestic sphere being used to decorate the lunettes above the garlands. Sometimes individual motifs are combined, as we see on a sarcophagus in the Palazzo Mattei which shows Oedipus and the Sphinx at the left, and Polyphemus and Galatea at the right, a scene that had long been popular in domestic painting.⁸³ Elsewhere, different episodes of a single myth are shown in a series of images, as on the Theseus and Ariadne sarcophagus in New York (fig. 5.18), or the Louvre Actaeon sarcophagus.⁸⁴ Both of these myths are popular in earlier wall-painting

⁸¹ Nock 1946: 166.

⁸² For discussions of these see Herdejürgen 1996: 27–53; Junker 2005–6: 168–71.

⁸³ Rome, Palazzo Mattei; Herdejürgen 1996: no. 31. For a discussion of Polyphemus in domestic art see Squire 2009: 300–56 with bibliography.

⁸⁴ New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art inv. 90.12; Paris, Louvre, MA 459; Herdejürgen 1996: nos. 23, 26. For a discussion of the representation of narrative on these sarcophagi see Brilliant 1984: 126–34. A comparable representation of the story of Marsyas told through a series of vignettes can be seen in Rome, Palazzo Barberini; Herdejürgen 1996: no. 30.



Figure 5.18 Garland sarcophagus with scenes of Theseus and Ariadne. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchase by subscription, 1890 (90.12).

and the vignettes echo much of the earlier iconography. There are a couple of garland sarcophagi with myths that repeatedly reappear in funerary art, such as a fragment showing the rape of Persephone and one with Medea carrying off the bodies of her sons, both scenes that feature on later frieze sarcophagi, but these are rare.⁸⁵ A funerary resonance may also have been read into some of the other mythological narratives, for example in the violent death of Actaeon, torn to pieces by his hounds, or the scenes of corpses that appear on the side of the Actaeon sarcophagus and in the right lunette of a sarcophagus in Basel which shows, at the left, Odysseus and Philoctetes.⁸⁶ In general, however, their main point of reference seems to be to the display of mythological narratives in the domestic sphere and in the minor arts, stressing the culture and wealth of the deceased and setting up the tomb as an eternal home.⁸⁷

Like these garland sarcophagi, the Tomb of the Pancratii seems to have been originally conceived as a beautiful resting place for those who would be placed in the monumental sarcophagus at its centre. Over time more sarcophagi were added, probably initially placed in the antechamber to the tomb.⁸⁸ These include scenes of the myths of Adonis and Hippolytus, introducing new elements into the mythological repertoire of the tomb that do use myth to assert values about the deceased and comment on the experience of death or hopes for the afterlife.⁸⁹ In its original conception, however, the funerary resonances of myth were not to the forefront; what mattered was to construct a suitable eternal home for the dead.

In their reuse mostly of myths previously found in the domestic sphere, the Tomb of the Pancratii and the garland sarcophagi are fairly unusual in Roman funerary art, and perhaps reflect the novelty at this period of the introduction of mythological imagery into the funerary sphere and its derivation from the domestic arena. Much more common later, as we

⁸⁵ Venice, Museo Archeologico inv. 167; previously Florence, Palazzo Martelli: Herdejürgen 1996: nos. 35, 40.

⁸⁶ Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig inv. Lu255. Herdejürgen 1996: no. 16 identifies the corpse as that of Paris.

⁸⁷ See Herdejürgen 1996: 34–6, concluding that the myths are not intended to have a specific funerary symbolism.

⁸⁸ For a list of those found see Herdejürgen 2000: 224–31; Dresken-Weiland 2003: 313–14, Kat. A55. Borg 2013: 146–50 suggests a change of ownership between the initial decoration of the tomb and the addition of the sarcophagi.

⁸⁹ The Adonis sarcophagus in particular has the unusual depiction of Adonis and Aphrodite seated centrally, with portrait heads, and offers a more hopeful interpretation of the myth than we find elsewhere: Robert 1919: no. 21; Koortbojian 1995: 50–3.

will see in the following two examples, is the combination of funerary and non-funerary motifs to create a resting place which alludes to earthly delights and pursuits, but also acknowledges the funerary function of the space.

‘La Grotta’ on the Via Salaria

This lost tomb was destroyed during the eighteenth century and is now known only from drawings preserved in two sixteenth-century codices.⁹⁰ It seems to have consisted of a brick-built tomb with niches for cinerary urns. On the two end walls large paintings depicted a wine-pressing scene overseen by Dionysus and Ariadne on the entrance wall, and a scene of agriculture on the back wall. The richly decorated ceiling consisted of a number of stucco panels orientated around a central roundel of Sol.⁹¹ Around this, the central section of the vault was decorated with four small rectangular panels depicting the story of Marsyas with busts of the four seasons in the corners. The left side of the vault featured a number of other mythological scenes. A prominent scene of three Danaids occupied the centre, flanked by two panels showing Heracles, on the left leading Alcestis out from Hades, and on the right being thanked by her husband Admetus. The decoration of the right curve of the vault was less well preserved; the drawing shows only a large panel of Dionysus and Ariadne watching a wrestling contest between Pan and Eros. Smaller panels across the ceiling were filled with figures of Erotes and animals. The Danaids and Alcestis assert the funerary nature of this space, but the overall tone of the imagery is largely celebratory, drawing from the repertoire of domestic art and reflecting the joys and fertility of the natural world and the Dionysiac realm. The scenes of the myth of Marsyas perhaps act as a warning against *hubris*, while the Danaids and Alcestis may also suggest the contrasting of happy and unhappy mythological experiences of the Underworld, as can be seen in the back lower register of the Velletri sarcophagus.⁹² Like the

⁹⁰ The Codex Pighianus and the Codex Anonymus Destailleur. See von Hesberg 1987 for a detailed description; also Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: 76–8, K32. Mielsch 1975: 185, A16 suggests a date in the Antonine period.

⁹¹ von Hesberg 1987: 393, fig. 1; Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: 78, fig. 67.

⁹² Note that Keuls 1974 reads images of the Danaids as one of purification through toil, rather than straightforward punishment, which gives the myth a more positive spin in funerary contexts.

Tomb of the Pancratii, the arrangement of the ceiling seems to evoke the sort of decoration we might find in the house. Here, however, a number of funerary myths are also included to relate to the function of the space they decorate.

The Tomb of the Nasonii

My most complex example is the Tomb of the Nasonii on the Via Flaminia, dated to the late second or early third century AD.⁹³ The tomb is now in a poor state of repair, partly destroyed and with the surviving paintings very faded. For reconstruction of its decorative programme we are heavily reliant on the drawings made by Pietro Santi Bartoli, and the engravings made after them that were included in Bellori's 1680 publication of the tomb.⁹⁴ Bernard Andreae combined these engravings (reversed, to show the original orientation of the images) with surviving paintings to produce a photomontage of the decorative scheme of the tomb, illustrated here (fig. 5.19). The tomb had a geometric mosaic floor and was richly decorated on both its walls and ceiling. It was built to accommodate inhumation burials, with three large arcosolia along both long walls of the main chamber, and one in the centre of the back wall. Extra burials were later provided by fossae dug into the main floor of the tomb along the walls. All seven of the arcosolia niches were decorated with large figural panels. A series of smaller rectangular panels formed a frieze along the top of the walls, while the ceiling scheme centred around a central medallion of Pegasus. Mythological scenes make up the majority of the arcosolia and frieze panels, while the ceiling design consists of groups of Bacchic figures, representations of the seasons and small vignettes of hunting scenes.⁹⁵

The arcosolia scenes seem to be primarily funerary in nature (fig. 5.20). In the back niche Hermes was shown leading a heavily draped woman through an arch into the presence of two other figures, a standing man dressed in a long garment and wearing a wreath of leaves and a female

⁹³ Andreae 1963: 88–130; Messineo 2000; Feraudi-Gruénais 2001: 66–73, K28; Borg 2013: 59–62, 244–6. Borg 2013: 62 argues that the lack of any provision for cremations indicates a third-century date, though see also Andreae 1963: 96–7, 119–20 and Messineo 2000: 77–9 for arguments suggesting an earlier date.

⁹⁴ Bartoli and Bellori 1680; reprinted in several subsequent editions. Messineo 2000: esp. 17–18 also cites the seventeenth and eighteenth-century paintings of the Palazzo del Drago in Rome, which drew on the decoration of the tomb.

⁹⁵ Andreae 1963: 88–120 gives a thorough discussion and full illustrations; see also Messineo 2000, incorporating the results of the restoration.

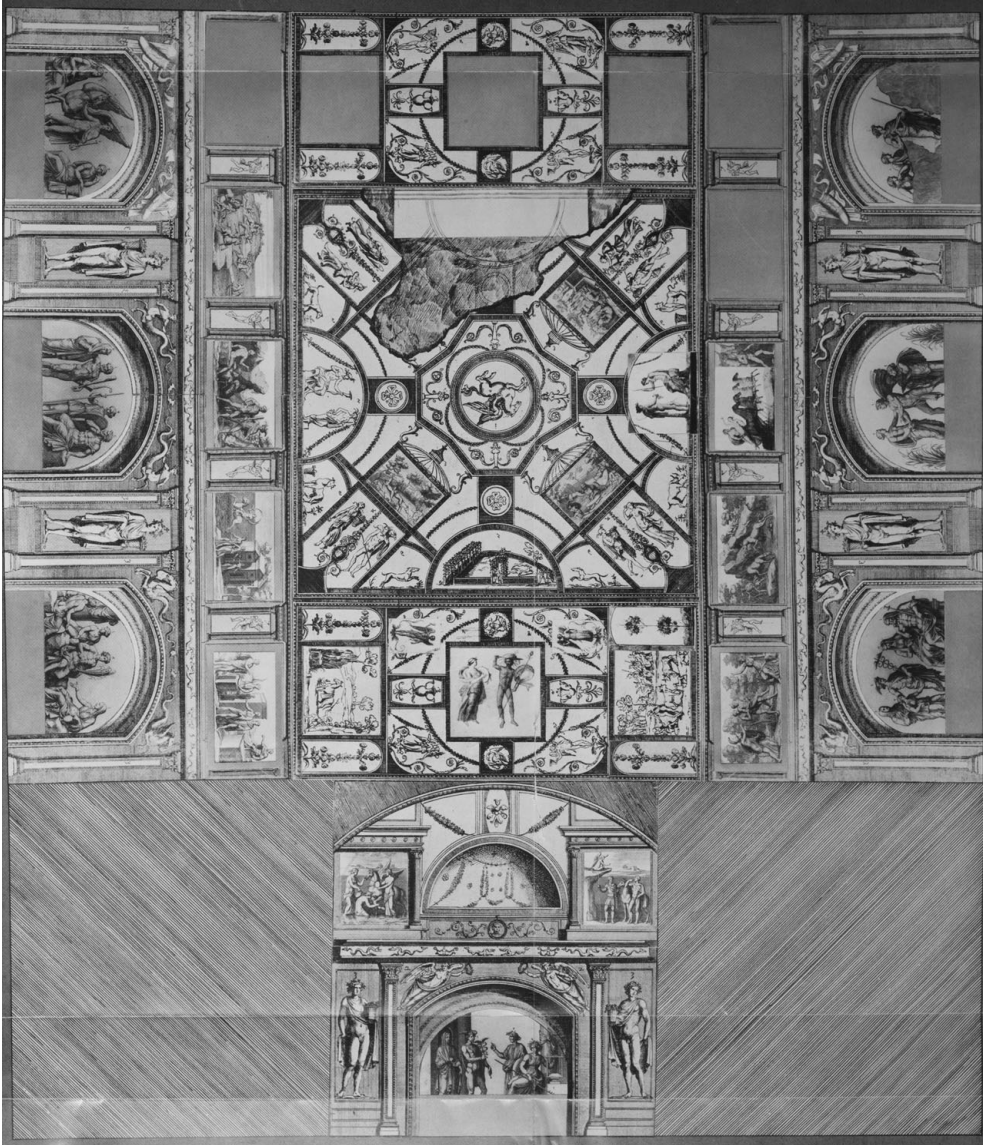


Figure 5.19 Photomontage of the decorative scheme of the Tomb of the Nasonii, Via Flaminia, Rome.

figure, also wearing a wreath and holding a lyre. Andreae accepted Eisler's interpretation of this scene as the return of Eurydice to Orpheus, identified as a poet by his wreath.⁹⁶ However, Bartoli's representation of this figure

⁹⁶ Eisler 1922–3: 163; Andreae 1963: 121.

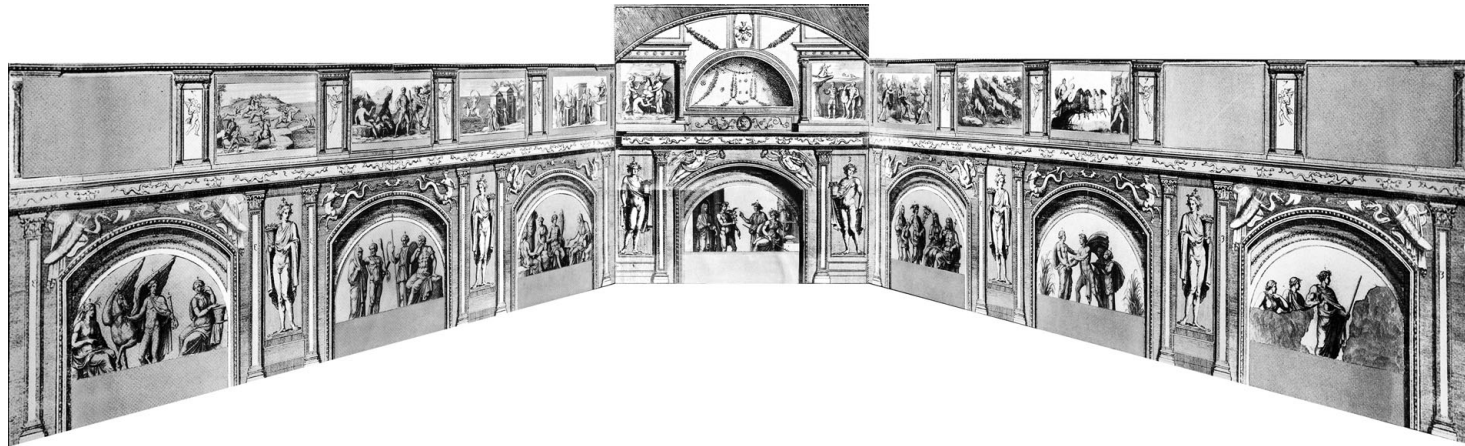


Figure 5.20 Reconstruction of the decorative scheme of the Tomb of the Nasonii, as it appears on entering the tomb.

shows him as an old man with sunken cheeks and there is nothing intrinsic to the painting which suggests an identification as Orpheus.

Rather, this could be a depiction of one of the deceased whom the tomb will hold being taken by Hermes to the Underworld and entrusted to these two poetic figures.⁹⁷ An inscription found within the tomb identifies it as set up by Q. Nasonius Ambrosius for himself and his wife, Nasonia Urbix, as well as their freedmen and their descendants.⁹⁸ According to Bellori the inscription was found in the earth in the back niche; it is uncertain whether it represents the dedicatory inscription for the tomb as a whole, which would usually have been located on the exterior of the tomb, though the reference to a large number of burials makes this very likely.⁹⁹ The association of the inscription with this niche certainly makes it likely that the dead woman shown in the painting should be identified with the woman the tomb was dedicated to, Nasonia Urbix. Drawing on this inscription Bellori had suggested that the tomb belonged to a descendant of the poet Ovid, whose full name was Publius Ovidius Naso, and that Ovid was represented in the painting here, an association which led to the tomb being identified as that of Ovid in subsequent generations.¹⁰⁰

While this familial connection has now been rejected, it remains possible that the owners of the tomb, the Nasonii, were indeed here making a pun on the resemblances between their family name and the cognomen of this famous poet.¹⁰¹ Such puns on names can be found in the funerary context elsewhere, especially on the monuments of freedmen, as on the well-known funerary altar of Ti. Octavius Diadoumenos in the Vatican with its representation of Polycleitus' eponymous statue.¹⁰² The Nasonii may have enjoyed the elevating association this punning play allowed them

⁹⁷ The central parting worn by the veiled figure is consistent with Severan female hairstyles and her long face, as shown by Bartoli, may suggest a portrait. Cf. Borg 2013: 244 for a similar reading of this scene.

⁹⁸ *CIL* VI.22882. ⁹⁹ Bartoli and Bellori 1680: 10; Andreae 1963: 96–7.

¹⁰⁰ Bartoli and Bellori 1680: 11–16; Trapp 1973: 61–74. On Bellori's interpretation of the tomb see Leach 2001.

¹⁰¹ Ovid is referred to as Naso in Martial, *Epigrams* 5.10.10 as well as in later fourth- and fifth-century texts showing the enduring memory of the poet and his full name in these centuries. See citations in Stroh 1969. Cf. also *CIL* X.6127, an inscription found near Formia, which reads *Poeta Ovidianus hic quiescit*, 'an Ovidian poet rests here'. I am grateful to Ian Fielding for these references.

¹⁰² Vatican, Cortile Belvedere 29PE. Compare the funerary altar of M. Statilius Aper, which evokes the myth of Meleager and plays on the deceased's name through representing a dead boar at his feet: Rome, Capitoline Museums, MC 209. Koortbojian 1995: 354 n. 46 and fig. 10.

to make with a famous poet of the Augustan past with its simultaneous suggestion both of longstanding Roman identity and of literary *paideia*. If so, we might indeed recognise Ovid as the poetic figure in the Underworld shown here who, with his Muse, extends a welcome to the newly deceased figure of Nasonia Urbix.

A number of the lunettes on the side walls continue this focus on the Underworld. The last niche of the right wall shows Hermes and a draped woman escorting a smaller female figure into the presence of Pluto and Persephone. The draped woman may be read as another mythological figure, such as Alcestis, who is named on a similar painting in the Vincentius Tomb on the Via Appia, although it is perhaps more likely that she is another representation of the deceased woman shown in the back niche, whom she resembles closely, here escorting another member of her family into the Underworld.¹⁰³ Funerary literature can offer as a consolation to the bereaved the idea that their lost relative will be welcomed into the Underworld either by mythological figures or by other close friends or family, as we see in Statius' poetic consolations.¹⁰⁴ Here we have a visual version of the same conceit, picturing a dead family member being welcomed into the Underworld.

Another Underworld scene appears in the middle niche of the left wall where Heracles is shown leading a draped woman before a seated man and another standing figure. This has been identified either as Heracles returning Alcestis to Admetus or as Heracles accompanying Laodameia into the Underworld to meet her husband Protesilaus.¹⁰⁵ There are iconographical parallels for both: a similar painting of around the same period in Tomb ϕ of the Vatican Necropolis is usually identified as Heracles and Alcestis, but an earlier stucco from the Tomb of P. Aelius Maximus at Isola Sacra is specifically labelled as Laudamia and Heracles, approaching the seated figure of Pluto and a standing man identified as Protesilaus (fig. 5.21).¹⁰⁶ Bartoli's drawing of the Nasonii scene shows the seated man as bearded and semi-draped, in a pose very similar to that of Pluto in

¹⁰³ For the comparison to Alcestis in the Vincentius Tomb see Wilpert 1903: 392, pl. 132.2; Andreae 1963: 30. The engraving shows her with the same central parting as the woman in the back niche, however, suggesting that the same woman may be represented in both.

¹⁰⁴ Statius, *Silvae* 5.1.253–8 pictures Priscilla received by ancient heroines (sent by Persephone, in a close echo of this image), while 2.1.189–207 shows Melior's dead friend Blaesus taking care of his beloved foster son in the Underworld.

¹⁰⁵ Andreae 1963: 121–2. ¹⁰⁶ Calza 1928: 147–64, esp. 153, fig. 15.

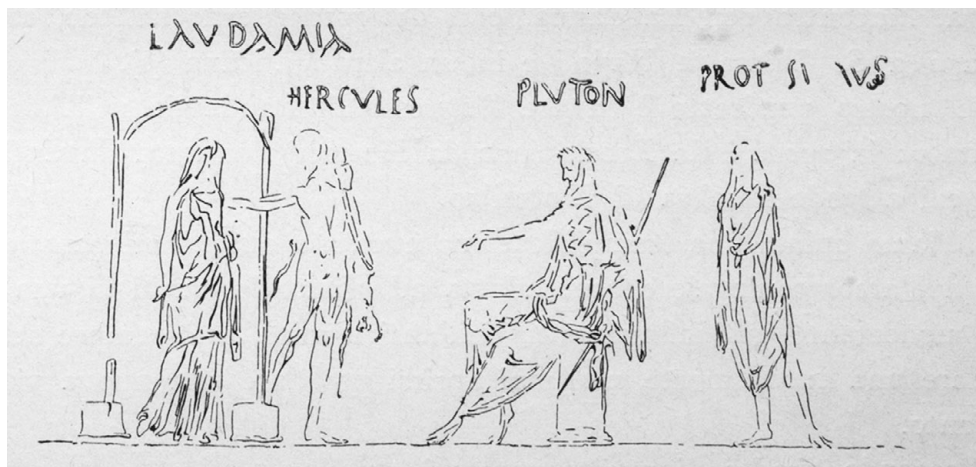


Figure 5.21 Detail of the stucco decoration in the Tomb of P. Aelius Maximus, Isola Sacra, showing Protesilaus and Laodameia.

the lunette from the back of the right wall, discussed above. While Bartoli's engraving shows the standing figure as a woman, the dress, hairstyle and skin colour of the figure as it survives today are not unequivocally female and it may well have represented a man. It seems likely, therefore, that Andreae's identification of the figures as Pluto and Protesilaus is correct, and that this scene did indeed show the reunion of Laodameia and Protesilaus.¹⁰⁷

Three of the niches thus seem to show figures being brought into the Underworld. A fourth example might also have been found in the first niche of the right wall. This shows a youthful male figure with laurel wreath, presumably a poet, accompanied by two women and standing in front of another figure which is now lost. Andreae suggests that it showed Orpheus before Pluto, entreating him to allow Orpheus' reunion with Eurydice; he identifies the female figures as Persephone and Eurydice herself. The panel opposite showed Bellerophon and Pegasus in the company of two female figures. Perhaps this represented Bellerophon and Sthenoboa, whose adulterous love for the hero offers a negative contrast to the enduring love between Orpheus and Eurydice.¹⁰⁸ Two other panels have both been interpreted as showing Hylas. However, the middle panel of

¹⁰⁷ Andreae 1963: 121–2. See especially the drawing and colour photographs in Messineo 2000: figs. 21, 38–9, though he identifies the standing figure as Athena (p. 40).

¹⁰⁸ Andreae 1963: 122.

the right side, which shows a man with flying drapery grasping the hand of a standing woman, does not look like a typical scene of the abduction of Hylas by the nymphs, and Andreae's interpretation of it as the return of Adonis to Venus/Aphrodite as told by Hyginus and Apollodorus seems more plausible.¹⁰⁹ The other panel identified as Hylas is the last panel on the left side. Here a young male figure sits on a rock, holding a bunch of reeds and accompanied by three women. It could well represent Hylas among the nymphs, after his abduction, but in its idyllic tone might also be a more generic example of rest and relaxation amid the joys of nature, perhaps eliciting thoughts of the Elysian fields in which dead heroes were supposed to reside.

As will be obvious from this rather lengthy discussion, the scenes represented here are difficult to pin down, differing from the common iconography of many of these mythological scenes and allowing us to see them as either mythological or generic scenes. Yet in the majority there does seem to be a direct allusion to the funerary nature of the spaces they decorate, as well as an implied relationship to the fates of those who were buried here. Taken as a group they suggest a number of different examples of fates after death. At the back of the tomb we see one of the deceased entering the Underworld and being received by notable ancestors, their poetic dress suggesting that this will be a place of culture and repose, analogous to the happy receptions of the deceased imagined in some of Statius' consolations, or to Lucian's more parodic representation of the Isles of the Blest in the *True History*.¹¹⁰

Two other representations of the Underworld feature at the back of the side walls; on the right another deceased mortal is presented to Pluto and Persephone by Hermes, while opposite a heroic young man (perhaps Hylas) sits at peace surrounded by beautiful women. In the middle of the side walls are two scenes that could be read as reunions of loved ones – Aphrodite with Adonis on the right, and Laodameia with Protesilaus on the left. At the entrance to the tomb the paintings represent contrasting experiences of love – Orpheus entreating Pluto for the return of Eurydice (a reunion which ultimately fails), and on the left the dangerous love of Sthenoboeia for Bellerophon from which, however, he was able to escape due to his heroism. While the scene of Bellerophon has a less obvious funerary content than the other myths, it represents a contrasting form of love, and suggests a meditation about the powers of humans to affect

¹⁰⁹ Andreae 1963: 123; Hyginus, *Fabulae* 251; Apollodorus 3.14.4.

¹¹⁰ Statius, *Silvae* 2.1.189–207; 5.1.253–8. Lucian, *True History* 2.6–24.

their fates; while Bellerophon escapes death through his heroism and was ultimately turned into a star, Orpheus ultimately loses his beloved due to his own impatience. The placement of the imagery seems intended to interact directly with the viewer. The scenes at the entrance offer advice to the living on how best one might achieve a happy life and death; the middle scenes offer hopeful examples of the reunions of loved ones, while the three scenes at the back of the tomb show the deceased arriving in the Underworld and being welcomed there.

The scenes on the upper part of the wall are more eclectic, with less of an obvious funerary flavour. Moving clockwise from left to right, the surviving panels at the time of excavation showed wild beasts being captured, Heracles leading Cerberus out of the Underworld, the rape of Europa, a judgement scene (possibly Antigone before Creon, though the presence of wreaths also makes me suspect a poetic judgement), Pegasus, Oedipus and the Sphinx, two figures boxing (perhaps Heracles and Antaeus, though no defining attributes are shown), a hunt scene and the rape of Persephone.¹¹¹ Of these the rape of Persephone and Heracles and Cerberus clearly have funerary overtones, but many of the others do not. While some might be read as allusions to death or the afterlife, scenes such as those of hunting and wrestling do not have obvious funerary associations and perhaps relate more to the joys of earthly life than to death. Indeed, most of these scenes can be paralleled in domestic art, unlike the *arcosolia* scenes, which are more unusual. The placement of the panels in the form of a frieze, separated by architectural niches, as well as their variety in subject matter might have evoked the experience of viewing in a *pinacotheca*. Overall there is nothing inherently funerary about this collection of images. This is also true of the scenes on the ceiling. At the back of the tomb two panels show the Judgement of Paris and probably a scene of the Trojan horse, but the rest of the ceiling is occupied with scenes of the seasons and hunting scenes. As in the Tomb of the Pancratii, the decoration seems designed to evoke a lavishly decorated interior, similar to those that we find in domestic houses.

The programme of images presented here would also, as in the house, invite interpretation, either as an appreciation of the collection of fine images presented, or perhaps for its suggestions of a particular message. In the Tomb of the Nasonii the wall and ceiling decoration invites us to read it as primarily embellishment, indicating the cultural leanings of the family and perhaps, in the hunting scenes, also their relaxation, while the

¹¹¹ Andreae 1963: 124–6.

arcosolia themselves, placed directly above the tombs of the family, present a more complicated series of images that could be read as illustrations of life beyond the tomb, the endurance of marital love and the hope that one could continue to pursue emotional attachments even in the Underworld.

Conclusions

The decorative programmes discussed here have ranged from fairly simple combinations of one or two funerary motifs to assert the nature of the tomb as a place of the dead, to complex iconographic programmes such as that of the Tomb of the Nasonii. In their combination of a series of mythological images, often interspersed with still lives or landscapes, tombs seem to echo the decoration programmes of the home and, in many cases, such as the Tomb of the Pancratii, were probably primarily influenced by the desire to set up the tomb as a suitable home in which to rest for eternity. Yet in other cases, as in Tomb I in the Vatican Necropolis, the techniques of combining images that were drawn from domestic displays were employed instead to assert a specifically funerary message, about the nature of the tomb as the gateway to the Underworld, as well as to offer examples of emotional ties that might have resonated with those of the family who commissioned it.

Both specifically funerary motifs (such as Alcestis or Persephone) and other myths commonly found also in the domestic sphere appear in tomb decoration. If we look at tomb decoration in combination with the myths found on sarcophagi, we can discern a picture in which the greatest range of myths appears in the first half of the second century when they draw heavily on iconographies developed in the domestic sphere and the minor arts. On sarcophagi the imagery then settles down into a smaller range of myths, with a much clearer funerary message, either as illustrations of the destructive power of death or as analogies for the virtues of the deceased and the grief of the bereaved.¹¹² In tomb imagery, however, the eclecticism can continue, as we see in the Tomb of the Nasonii, which selects and combines images both to assert a funerary message and to position the tomb as a worthy *aeterna domus*, a home for eternity.

I have focussed in this chapter on family tombs, where the overall decorative programme reflects the choices of the patrons of the tomb and

¹¹² Junker 2005–6. For discussion of the mythological frieze sarcophagi see Sichtermann and Koch 1975; Zanker and Ewald 2004, 2012; and Chapter 6, below.

the image that they desired to project of themselves and their families. The imagery in shared tombs, such as columbaria, was sometimes more eclectic, and the choice here of mythological themes, as in the Augustan Columbarium of the Villa Doria Pamphili, or that of Pomponius Hylas, may be as much to mark out a set of niches as belonging to a different family or individual as for its specific funerary messages.¹¹³ In designing and commissioning a tomb for oneself and one's descendants, the owner was open to the same desires and possibilities as when decorating a home. We have seen in the last two chapters how mythological imagery in the house could be used both to set an elevated tone and to indicate the cultural pretensions of the family, but also as a talking point for discussion of different experiences of life and love, as well as to invite viewers into an escapist realm. Tomb imagery too can play a similar variety of roles, the tone changing according to the choices that were made. Thus while some tombs assert the wealth and *paideia* of the family through the combination of canonical and more obscure myths, as in the Tomb of the Pancratii, others choose to assert a more specific funerary message, either by selecting illustrations of the Underworld, as on the Velletri sarcophagus, or by combining myths with a funerary resonance. In other cases, the inclusion of imagery of Dionysiac delights or everyday pursuits, such as hunting and athletics, suggests the hope for a continuation of earthly delights into the tomb. This variety of imagery and associations reflects that which we find in contemporary grave epigrams, which range from nihilistic assertions that death is the end of everything to more euphemistic comparisons of death to eternal sleep and hopes for the reunion of family members beyond the tomb.¹¹⁴ While their messages pertain to their funerary setting, the ways in which myths were used and combined in the tomb also draw from the experience of myth in the domestic realm. It was only once myth was established as a framework for the discussion of social, emotional and cultural values in the home that it really became popular in the funerary realm.

Here we have looked at the decoration of the tomb as a whole, and the roles played by mythological imagery in asserting its funerary nature and the self-image of the family buried within. Yet the overall effect of the tomb was a composite of the tomb itself and the funerary furnishings within. While ash chests and sarcophagi could sometimes be set up at the same period as the tomb, designed to form a coherent whole, often they were

¹¹³ See above, n. 17 on these tombs.

¹¹⁴ For analyses of grave epitaphs see Lattimore 1942 and Carroll 2006: 126–208.

added over time, introducing new elements into the decorative ensemble which could help to change the overall messages. They are also much more clearly focussed on the celebration of individuals rather than a family as a whole, offering messages about the nature of the person contained within, and the effect of their death on their nearest and dearest. It is to these messages that the [next chapter](#) will turn.

6 | The Rhetoric of Mythological Sarcophagi: Praise, Lament and Consolation

The last two decades have seen a wealth of new thinking on Roman sarcophagi, moving the field forwards from the old dichotomy between classicism and eschatology with sensitive reappraisals of the capacity for decorative sarcophagi to serve both as memorials to the dead, and as active agents in the processes of grief and mourning.¹ This is particularly true in the study of mythological sarcophagi produced in and around the city of Rome. Following in the path of important articles by Blome, Giuliani and Fittschen, scholars such as Koortbojian, Zanker, Ewald and Bielfeldt have prompted us to rethink the ways in which sarcophagi spoke to the concerns of the dead and the bereaved, and the ways that Greek myths were turned towards the grief and self-representation of their Roman patrons.² In particular, Zanker and Ewald's 2004 book has shown the importance of thinking not just about what sarcophagi said about the deceased buried within, but also about the messages of consolation they could offer to the bereaved.³ These studies have established the multiple messages that sarcophagi imagery could present and the ways in which

¹ This dichotomy was exemplified by the polarised views of Cumont 1942 and Nock 1946, whose arguments against seeking messages about the afterlife generally won the day. For discussions see Turcan 1978; Koch and Sichtermann 1982: 583–617; North 1983; Ewald 1999a; Elsner and Wu 2012b: 7–12. For a defence of Cumont's approach see Balty 2013; also Platt 2011: 337–44 for a sensitive discussion of the problem. The bibliography on sarcophagi is extensive but for recent collections see Elsner and Huskinson 2011; Elsner and Wu 2012a; and Galinier and Baratte 2013; on contexts see Dresken-Weiland 2003, Meinecke 2012, 2013, 2014; on sarcophagi with portraits see Birk 2013; on third-century sarcophagi Borg 2013: 161–240; on strigillated sarcophagi Huskinson 2012 and 2015. There have also been a number of additions to the project to catalogue ancient sarcophagi in *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs*, on which see Koch 1995. For a holistic view of ancient sarcophagi Koch and Sichtermann 1982 is still useful.

² Blome 1978, 1992; Giuliani 1989; Fittschen 1992; Koortbojian 1995; Zanker 2000; Zanker and Ewald 2004, 2012; Bielfeldt 2005. See also Brilliant 1984: 124–65; Müller 1994; Grassinger 1994, 1998; Lorenz 2011. For catalogues of the mythological sarcophagi see Robert 1897, 1904, 1919, partly updated by Koch 1975 (Meleager), Sichtermann 1992 (Apollo-Graces); Grassinger 1999 (Achilles-Amazons). See also Jongste 1992 on Hercules and Gaggadis-Robin 1994 on Jason and Medea sarcophagi. Sichtermann and Koch 1975 provided an overview of mythological sarcophagi, now supplemented by Zanker and Ewald 2004, 2012. On the origins of mythological sarcophagi see Junker 2005–6.

³ Zanker and Ewald 2004, English translation 2012. Many of these ideas were presented in a shorter form in Zanker 2000.

Greek mythological narratives were selectively adapted to suit Roman values.

Recent research has also illuminated the contexts in which sarcophagi were viewed. Sarcophagi were frequently reused and redisplayed, both in antiquity and later.⁴ Yet in some cases we can recreate the original display and make suggestions about the role they played as part of a whole programme of images within the tomb.⁵ Sarcophagi could be positioned along the sides of a tomb chamber, sometimes in specially designed niches or arcosolia, or added to earlier tombs, occasionally disrupting the previous display.⁶ While evidence for cultic activities within the tomb chamber itself is sketchy, they were probably seen on the occasion of the funeral or lying-in-state, as well as on occasions when the tomb was opened up to receive new occupants.⁷ However, in at least some of the cases we know about they were completely buried, set into ditches in the floor of the tomb and invisible to the human eye.⁸ In these cases, the significance of the decoration rested on the associations it had for the purchaser at the point of commissioning – either by the deceased him- or herself, ante-mortem, or by a bereaved relative. In other cases, certain details of a sarcophagus might suggest particular ways in which it could have been read, while the circumstances of its actual display meant that this reading was not, in the end, available.⁹

Yet still there remain challenges and tensions.¹⁰ So often when interpreting sarcophagus imagery we have only half of the picture. We aim to see what the mythological imagery said about the deceased, their life and the impact of their death on their relatives without, in many cases, knowing who that deceased actually was: their age, gender or status. Skeletons

⁴ On the long afterlife of sarcophagi see Zanker and Ewald 2004: 9–27; 2012: 1–21; Huskinson 2011; Prado-Vilar 2011.

⁵ For detailed examples see Herdejürgen 2000; Dresken-Weiland 2003: 98–107, 295–350; Bielfeldt 2003; Borg 2013: 213–40; Meinecke 2013.

⁶ Meinecke and Borg both offer examples though with differing conclusions. Borg (2013: 213–40) stresses the continued importance into the third century AD of preserving the visibility of earlier sarcophagi while Meinecke (2013: 41–2) concludes that access was less important in this period.

⁷ Meinecke 2013; Borg 2013: 236–40. On the ancient funeral as a spectacle see Bodel 1999.

⁸ E.g. the Grottarossa sarcophagus, discussed below, Epilogue, n. 109. The Achilles sarcophagus in Ostia was also buried in one of its periods of reuse in antiquity: see Huskinson 2011: 60. For further discussions see Dresken-Weiland 2003: 185–98; Meinecke 2012; Borg 2013: 229–35.

⁹ See below on the Vatican Niobids sarcophagus, pp. 300–301.

¹⁰ Further on these see Elsner 2011; Galinier 2013; for useful discussions of the contexts in which sarcophagi were produced and viewed see also Dresken-Weiland 2003; Zanker and Ewald 2004: 28–36; 2012: 21–30; Russell 2011; Birk 2012; 2013: 9–58; Borg 2013: 213–40; Meinecke 2012, 2013, 2014.

are rarely preserved and, when they are, may sometimes be the result of later reuse of the sarcophagus. When deemed to be the original occupant of the sarcophagus, a skeleton can sometimes reveal information about the deceased that seems to jar with the imagery of the chest, prompting us to rethink our assumptions about the meanings of mythological imagery.¹¹ At other times we can glean information about the deceased from portrait heads added to the mythological figures, yet the question remains open whether these identifications reinforce the usual message of the mythological imagery, or instead authorise a particular reading, often in tension with other, more common, readings.¹²

When inscriptions are present, which is only in a minority of cases, they can help to identify the deceased and the relationship between them and the commissioner of the sarcophagus, illuminating the circumstances in which particular imagery was chosen.¹³ Yet, here too, the evidence cautions against assuming straightforward identifications between the deceased and a particular mythological character. When Junius Euhodus chose a sarcophagus decorated with the myth of Alcestis to commemorate his wife, Metilia Acte, he was presumably choosing Alcestis as the mythological prototype of a loyal wife, prepared to sacrifice herself for her husband (see [fig. 6.1](#), discussed further below).¹⁴ But elsewhere, the death of Alcestis could also be used by a mother to comment on the death of her daughter, as on a sarcophagus in St. Aignan.¹⁵ Metilia Acte's sarcophagus is heavily personalised through the addition of multiple portrait heads to the mythological characters, linking her with Alcestis and her husband with Admetus, yet it remains open whether other sarcophagi were to be read as asserting the close bond between husband and wife.¹⁶ Instead, the

¹¹ E.g. as in the case of the Grottarossa sarcophagus which has a prominent scene of Ascanius on the front, but contained the body of an eight-year-old girl: Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 168186; Grassinger 1999: 91–8, 222, no. 68. See further below, Epilogue, n. 109. Also discussed by Galinier 2013: 101–7.

¹² As argued in Newby 2011. On sarcophagi with portraits see now Birk 2013, with discussion of mythological scenes at 94–107. Earlier discussions in Fittschen 1984; Schauenburg 1980; Koch and Sichtermann 1982: 607–14; Zanker and Ewald 2004: 45–50; 2012: 39–44; Fejfer 2008: 133–5. On unfinished heads see also Andrae 1984b and Huskinson 1998.

¹³ See Dresken-Weiland 2003; Galinier 2013: 97–100; Borg 2013: 202–11; and Birk 2013: 22–31 for some examples.

¹⁴ Vatican, Museo Chiaramonti inv. 1195, Grassinger 1999: no. 76.

¹⁵ St. Aignan, Château; Grassinger 1999: no. 75. Mucznik 1996 reads the message as suggesting immortality. Note that the Greek inscription identifies the daughter as aged 22 years and 5 months (*IGUR* II, 2: no. 862; Robert 1897; Mucznik 1996: 6), not 12 years and 5 months, as stated by Grassinger 1999: 128.

¹⁶ For discussion of the group see Blome 1978: 435–45; Grassinger 1994; 1999: 110–28.

similarities with non-mythological *conclamatio* scenes suggest that many, such as the St. Aignan piece, may instead have used the myth's image of a young woman who dies an untimely death as a means to lament the loss of a close relative, perhaps regardless of whether that relative was male or female, single or married.¹⁷

Indeed, this is what the evidence of mythological scenes on grave altars and ash chests suggests, where the presence of inscriptions allows us to compare the choice of imagery with the identity of the deceased. Mythological scenes are relatively rare here, but one which does appear a number of times is the rape of Persephone.¹⁸ Of the nine known ash chests or grave altars where this scene is shown and an inscription is also present, five were dedicated to men, three to women and one to a married couple.¹⁹ This suggests that the resonance of the myth lay in its presentation of Persephone's sudden and violent transference to the Underworld rather than the gender of the heroine. It presented an image of sudden death which could be as appropriate to celebrate the death of a man as that of a woman.

All this suggests that multivalency was a key characteristic and advantage of mythological sarcophagi. Out of the various interpretations possible, the patron or deceased could choose those which best suited their own needs and emotions. In this chapter I will explore this range of possibilities by looking at how sarcophagi served as the visual equivalents of funerary rhetoric, comparing them to verbal forms of commemoration and consolation.²⁰ Those planning their tombs before death often seem to have combined visual and verbal elements to assert their chosen self-image, while the bereaved could commission both poems and material monuments to console their grief.²¹ The two media had

¹⁷ All the cases where we do know the identity of the deceased are, however, for females. See also the worn portrait head on Alcestis on a sarcophagus in Genoa, S. Maria delle Vigne; Grassinger 1999: no. 86, c. AD 200–210. On similarities with non-mythological *conclamatio* scenes see Amedick 1991: 79–81; Grassinger 1999: 118–19.

¹⁸ Davies 1986; 2011: 37–8; Boschung 1987: 51; Sinn 1987: 80. The majority of mythological scenes on altars and ash chests belong to the late first century or first half of the second century; for discussion of the rape of Persephone in other areas of funerary art see above, Chapter 5.

¹⁹ Men: Boschung 1987: nos. 759, 764 (= Sinn 1987: no. 521), 781, 820; Lindner 1984: no. 62; women: Boschung 1987: no. 821; Sinn 1987: no. 668; Lindner 1984: no. 58; couple: Boschung 1987: no. 780.

²⁰ On the parallels between art and rhetoric more generally see the essays in Elsner and Meyer 2014, especially Borg 2014; Elsner 2014; Newby 2014; and Vout 2014 on funerary art.

²¹ See e.g. Trimalchio's plans for his tomb, which is to include an inscription outlining his career alongside visual depictions of him: Petronius, *Satyricon* 71. Statius, *Silvae* 3.3.215–16; 5.1.1–15 explicitly compares his poems to material funerary monuments and his patrons are shown as commissioning both forms of memorial.

to satisfy similar demands and desires, albeit in their own particular ways. The care and expense lavished on many of the mythological sarcophagi suggest that they were commissioned by wealthy, powerful patrons who were attracted by the possibility of crystallising their emotions and memories.²² A brief exploration of the different types of verbal commemoration and their themes identifies three main aspects of funerary rhetoric which the sarcophagi too can be seen as satisfying: praise, lament and consolation.

Through this comparison of sarcophagi to funerary rhetoric I aim to bring together some of the many different readings that have been offered for mythological sarcophagi, which tend to see them primarily as either about asserting the virtues of the deceased or as offering consolation to the bereaved and to show how these readings can be seen as complementary, rather than competing.²³ I also wish to explore further the tensions between the desire to relate myth to contemporary needs and values, and the wider narrative context.²⁴ A number of studies have noted the ways that, in time, sarcophagi tend towards the abstraction of the central figures, with the rest of the mythological narrative becoming reduced to a secondary level. Rather than the mythological narrative content of the myth being entirely lost, however, in this elision between human and mythological situations, the mythological nature of this realm and the details of the narrative itself provide a way to explore human emotions and situations through reference to a counter world, which was certainly reinterpreted through the prism of changing Roman values, but was not entirely made equivalent to them. In other words, the alienness and narrative content of the myth remained an important part of its attraction,

²² Sarcophagus patrons seem to have come from a variety of backgrounds. While freedmen feature prominently in the funerary record, including on tombs and sarcophagi with mythological subjects, we also know of senators and knights commissioning sarcophagi. In all cases, wealth was an important prerequisite and suggests that we should not seek to draw firm lines between 'freedmen' and 'free' art. For discussions see Taylor 1961; Mouritsen 2005; and on 'freedmen art', L. H. Petersen 2006.

²³ E.g. Grassinger 1994 compared to Zanker in Zanker and Ewald 2004. See also Ewald 2012: 53–4 for a critique of the focus on myths as *exempla*; against his point that many of the myths do not support traditional Roman values, I would argue instead that they can still be read as offering *exempla*, but that these reflected changing social values, such as the stress on personal life which he also emphasises in this article. This change of values is discussed further in the Epilogue below.

²⁴ See Blome 1992 with discussion by Bielfeldt 2005: 16–22; also Koortbojian 1995 on typologies and Borg 2013: 161–78 relating the third-century emphasis on the central group, which often features portraits, to the desire to present an encomium of the deceased.

however much it could be adapted and excerpted to provide snapshots of exemplary values.²⁵

Funerary Rhetoric: *Laudationes*, Consolations and Epitaphs

In a recent paper, Jaś Elsner asserts the rhetorical nature of sarcophagi, and the ways in which their visual narratives can be read as panegyric statements about the deceased.²⁶ Previous scholars have also related sarcophagus imagery to verbal forms of commemoration, linking the choices of mythological subjects to the growing influence of Greek rhetorical theory, which often advises the search for mythological analogies to prove a point (in contrast to Latin rhetoric, which is more likely to seek out *exempla* from Roman history), or through seeing the use of myths on sarcophagi as primarily motivated by the search for analogies to stress the deceased's *virtus*.²⁷ A number of studies have also shown the ways that Greek myths were adapted to suit the expression of Roman virtues, often with the result that prominent themes in earlier retellings of the myths were sidelined in favour of a concentration on those aspects that suited a Roman funerary message.²⁸ There has not yet been a comprehensive attempt to relate the themes of sarcophagi to the different types of funerary rhetoric, despite the evidence that the same patrons could commission both physical and poetic memorials for their loved ones, and the awareness that the viewing of funerary images was conditioned by the circumstances in which they were seen, most

²⁵ Because my primary interest in this book is on mythological narratives, rather than the mythological world as a whole, I do not here discuss sarcophagi with generalised worlds of Dionysiac revelry or marine scenes, nor the excerpted images that appear on strigillated sarcophagi or beneath shield portraits, though these raise interesting questions about the tendency to abstraction mentioned above. On strigillated sarcophagi see Huskinson 2015: 151–80 on mythological scenes.

²⁶ Elsner 2014. He argues that the shift from pagan to Christian sarcophagi lies in part in a rhetorical shift from panegyric to *psogos*. Borg 2013: 161–211 and Galinier 2013 also argue for a rhetorical reading of sarcophagi images; in particular Galinier's focus on *pietas* is similar to my own. Both appeared after the first draft of this chapter was written. I am grateful to Jaś Elsner for showing me his paper before publication.

²⁷ Müller 1994: 91–105, 143–56; Koortbojian 1995: 5–9, 34–7.

²⁸ E.g. Grassinger 1994. See comments of Ewald 2011: 261–7, 276–82. The use of Greek myths to stress Roman virtues has been labelled *interpretatio romana*. Blome 1992 suggests that this gradually increased during the period of mythological sarcophagi, an argument refuted by Biefeldt 2005: 16–22, 329–32, who shows that it can be seen in even early Orestes sarcophagi. See further Lorenz 2011: 309–11.

probably at the funeral and perhaps in ensuing visits to the tomb by relatives.²⁹

Funerary rhetoric took a number of different forms in the Roman world. The most important, but also the hardest for us to recreate, was the oration given at the funeral of the deceased, which praised his or her qualities and achievements. These seem to have taken two forms. Public funerals were granted to men of particular importance and included a eulogy given in the Forum either by a member of the family or sometimes by a man appointed by the senate, focussing on praise of the deceased and his ancestors. These speeches are often described as having a clear exhortatory function, aiming to praise the deceased but also to encourage the audience to emulate the model set before them.³⁰ More private speeches also seem to have been given to some individuals, perhaps at the site of the grave, as is suggested by the presence of two epigraphical texts containing speeches in honour of otherwise unknown women, the '*Laudatio Turiae*' and the *Laudatio Murdiae*.³¹

Only fragments of these *laudationes* survive, sometimes in inscriptions (as above) or papyri (as with a fragmentary copy of Augustus' eulogy for Agrippa), but more often in reworked or abbreviated forms in literary works.³² This makes it hard to recreate them in their entirety, but in general it seems that they consisted of records of the deceased's achievements during their lifetimes and their personal virtues. The surviving text of Augustus' eulogy for Agrippa focuses on his public offices, such as the holding of tribunician power, as well as praising his excellence (*aretē*), while texts praising women record their possession of typical

²⁹ Zanker and Ewald employ some of the themes of funerary rhetoric, such as celebration, lament and consolation, but do not give detailed references to the literary material: see 2004: 5, 43, 110–11; 2012: ix, 37, 103–5. For a more focussed analysis of sarcophagi in the light of Statius' poetic consolations, see Newby 2014.

³⁰ This is particularly clear in Polybius 6.53–4. For discussion of the *laudatio funebris* see Kierdorf 1980, also Flower 1996: 125–58. Public funerals for non-imperial figures in Rome seem to have decreased during the Principate but a few are still attested, such as that for L. Verginius Rufus in AD 97, when the funeral oration was given by Tacitus (Pliny, *Letters* 2.1.6). On funerals see also Bodel 1999.

³¹ The so-called *Laudatio Turiae* (CIL VI.1527, 31670, 37053 = ILS 8393) is the longer and gives the text of a speech by a husband commemorating his dead wife, though the identification with the Turia mentioned by Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 6.7.2, is now largely rejected: see Wistrand 1976; Kierdorf 1980: 33–48, 139–45, no. 24 and Horsfall 1983. The *laudatio* for Murdia is CIL VI.10230 = ILS 8394; see Kierdorf 1980: 145–6, no. 25.

³² The text of Agrippa's *laudatio* is given in Koenen 1970; also Kierdorf 1980: 138–9, no. 21. For an example of the ways literary versions could vary, compare the renderings of Mark Antony's speech at the funeral of Julius Caesar given by Appian, *Civil War* 2.144–6 and Dio 44.36–49, discussed by Kierdorf 1980: 150–8.

female virtues such as beauty, modesty, piety and chastity, and household skills such as wool-working.³³

The epigraphic texts generally seem to stay close to the details of the deceased's life, choosing to illustrate their virtues through reference to their own lives rather than through comparisons with other *exempla*. Thus in the 'Laudatio Turiae' the long narrative of the deceased's actions to protect her inheritance in the unsettled circumstances of the late first century BC is held up by her husband as evidence of her 'duty to your father, piety to your sister and faith to me', identifying her as in possession of the virtues of *officium*, *pietas* and *fides*.³⁴ However, there is some evidence that over time the gradual influence of Greek rhetorical theory caused greater embellishment in the *laudationes*. Kierdorf suggests that they gradually came to include subjects such as the deceased's education and lifestyle, in addition to the simple list of their achievements.³⁵

Examination of the strictures regarding praise oratory in Latin and Greek rhetorical handbooks suggests that such speeches should include details of a man's family, birth, titles and wealth as well as his qualities of body and mind and his actions and achievements.³⁶ Quintilian suggests that the arrangement of the speech could vary, sometimes approaching the subject's life chronologically, moving from natural abilities to education and then deeds and sayings, but in other cases dividing it according to the various virtues manifested through various acts.³⁷ The Greek handbooks give more space to the *epitaphios logos* (funeral speech) and include some aspects not mentioned by the Latin rhetoricians such as the suggestion that they include material to be used for lament, as well as a passage of consolation to the bereaved.³⁸ These aspects of Greek rhetoric do not seem to have been incorporated into Roman speeches until late antiquity,

³³ ILS 8393, I. ll. 30–32; 8394 ll. 28–30; Matidia: Kierdorf 1980: no. 38. Tacitus, *Annals* 16.6.2 notes of Nero's eulogy of his wife Poppaea that he praised 'her beauty and motherhood of a divine child [the baby she was pregnant with when she died] as well as other gifts of fortune as if they were virtues'.

³⁴ ILS 8393, I. ll. 25–6. For the reading *officium* see Wistrand 1976: 35. For a discussion of the way this text reveals the deceased to possess peculiarly masculine virtues as well as the usual female ones, see Hemelrijk 2004.

³⁵ Kierdorf 1980: 49–93.

³⁶ Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.341–50; *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 3.6.10–11; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 3.7.10–18. Cf. Menander Rhetor, *Treatise* II. 420 eds. Russell and Wilson 1981. The Latin handbooks are generally brief on praise oratory, regarding it as alien to Latin practice, with the exception of brief testimonials in the Forum and funeral orations: Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.341; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 3.7.2. Kierdorf 1980: 49–54; Rees 2007: 138.

³⁷ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 3.7.15–16. ³⁸ Menander Rhetor, *Treatise* II. 419–21.

though they do have an influence in other areas of funerary literature such as prose and verse consolations.³⁹

The rhetorical treatises suggest that the bulk of the speech should concentrate on the deceased's life and qualities. In Greek rhetoric this is augmented through comparison to other notable models from the past. Thus Menander Rhetor argues that 'one must show him to be nobler than the noble or fit to rival any man of distinction – for example by comparing his life with that of Heracles or Theseus'.⁴⁰ Mythological comparanda are largely missing from the surviving Latin speeches, though Dio's account of Tiberius' funeral speech for Augustus includes the suggestion that Augustus' courageous actions on the death of Caesar surpassed even those of Alexander the Great or Romulus, both thought to have performed notable exploits during their youth.⁴¹ Heracles alone furnishes a suitable comparison, he says, and even he only had to struggle with animals, whereas Augustus had to contend with men.⁴² It is unclear whether this is an accurate reflection of what Tiberius actually said (thus showing the influence of Greek rhetorical theory on Latin practice), or rather a version given by Dio who would himself have been influenced by the Greek rhetorical theories of his time. Early Latin *laudationes* did, of course, make references to the deeds of historical ancestors, but generally there is less concrete evidence that they made use of mythological parallels.⁴³

The use of *laudationes* for understanding mythological sarcophagi lies, then, in the qualities and aspects of the deceased's life that were praised, rather than in the specific means used to achieve this. In their concentration on the actual events of an individual's life (though perhaps in an idealised form) and the virtues they embody, they are closer to the so-called *Vita Romana* and *Vita Privata* sarcophagi with their focus on 'real life' scenes than to mythological sarcophagi.⁴⁴ Even here, however, the scenes chosen are stereotypical, designed to encapsulate and illustrate a particular virtue, rather than illustrate real episodes from the deceased's

³⁹ Kierdorf 1980: 82–90.

⁴⁰ Menander Rhetor, *Treatise* II. 421, trans. Russell and Wilson 1981: 177. Cf. Ps-Dionysius, *On Epideictic Speeches* 6 (282), discussed below.

⁴¹ Dio 56.36.3. ⁴² Dio 56.36.4–5.

⁴³ Müller 1994: 114–51 stresses the role of mythological *exempla* in Greek funerary rhetoric and the familiarity of Greek rhetoric at Rome during the second century, but admits that there is little evidence of it influencing Roman orators such as Quintilian. Instead, he notes its strong influence on Statius, a poet who himself came from a Hellenised family in Campania. On the impact of Greek rhetoric on Statius see A. Hardie 1983 compared with van Dam 1984: 5–7.

⁴⁴ On these groups see Reinsberg 2006; Amedick 1991. For a comparison of biographical sarcophagi with funerary orations see Kampen 1981.

life. Thus it has long been recognised that the sarcophagi with scenes of generals, marriage and sacrifice assert the typical Roman virtues of *virtus*, *pietas*, *clementia* and *concordia* rather than necessarily illustrating actual episodes from the life of the deceased, though it is usually assumed that they were commissioned by men from senatorial families.⁴⁵ Yet the *laudationes* are a crucial backdrop to mythological sarcophagi since they show the types of deeds and virtues for which the deceased could be praised. On non-mythological sarcophagi these virtues were exemplified through scenes of the deceased sacrificing (*pietas*), fighting or hunting (*virtus* and *fortitudo*), in partnership with his wife (*concordia*), or in the attitude of an intellectual (stressing the Greek quality of *paideia*).⁴⁶ Once the canonical virtues are established we can see how the mythological sarcophagi can also be read as a form of visual *laudatio*. Here, however, the deceased's virtues and attributes are expressed through comparison with mythological *exempla*, asserting, for example, that their achievements could be likened to those of Heracles.⁴⁷ In their use of mythological parallels, these sarcophagi employ different techniques to those of the Roman *laudatio*, adopting instead the modes of Greek funerary rhetoric and of poetry.

Indeed, although mythological *exempla* rarely appear in the surviving texts of Latin *laudationes*, they do appear frequently in two other areas of funerary literature, consolations and epitaphs, particularly those in verse. Consolations fall into two types, prose and verse, which differ markedly in tone and use of examples. Prose consolations are characterised by a philosophical approach, advising the bereaved to bear the loss of their loved one bravely, as we see in the consolations of the Younger Seneca.⁴⁸ While praising the deceased they put the majority of their emphasis on the need for the bereaved to grieve only moderately, and to accept that death is not necessarily so great an evil as they believe. The qualities and achievements for which the deceased is praised agree closely with those

⁴⁵ Rodenwaldt 1935; Reinsberg 1995, 2006. Muth 2004 notes that the division into three scenes squashes *virtus* in favour of *concordia*. On senatorial authorship see Wrede 2001 with review by Ewald 2003; see also comments of Fejfer 2008: 133.

⁴⁶ Education is passed over in Cicero's requirements for panegyric, though it is mentioned briefly by the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (3.6.10: *educatio*) and by Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria* 3.7.15 where *disciplina* refers to a man's education).

⁴⁷ On the Heracles sarcophagi see Jongste 1992.

⁴⁸ Seneca, *Ad Marciam*; *Ad Polybium*; *Ad Helviam matrem* (on Seneca's exile). On the nature of consolatory literature see Kassel 1958; Atkinson 1985: 867–72; and Baltussen 2013. For analyses of Seneca's texts see Coccia 1959: 148–80; Abel 1967; Manning 1981; and recently Wilson 2013, arguing for a new approach. For discussions of Cicero's attitude to grief and consolation see Shelton 1995; Wilcox 2006.

found in *laudationes* and rhetorical texts on praise oratory, as can be seen in Seneca's reference to the *prudentia*, *pietas*, marriage, fatherhood, public office and priesthood which the son of Marcia had achieved in his short life.⁴⁹ Seneca employs historical *exempla*, from both Roman history and the more recent imperial family, to convince Marcia to grieve temperately and also to show that early death is not always a disaster.⁵⁰

Verse consolations, on the other hand, offer both a tone and a selection of examples that are much closer to those of the mythological sarcophagi. This can be seen particularly in the verse consolations included in Statius' *Silvae*, whose late first-century date brings them close to the beginnings of mythological sarcophagi a couple of decades later, though the earlier anonymous *Consolatio ad Liviam* also prefigures many of Statius' themes.⁵¹ These consolations give a free rein to the grief of the bereaved, and repeatedly use mythological comparisons to exemplify and augment both the praise of the deceased and the grief of their bereaved relatives. Mythological comparisons also appear in some inscribed epitaphs, though they are more common in verse than prose, and in those in Greek than in Latin, agreeing with the greater emphasis on myth that we find in Greek rhetoric and Greek and Latin poetry vis-à-vis Latin rhetoric and prose.⁵² All of these comparisons suggest that the use of myth in art helped to elevate the tone of a sarcophagus into the poetic rather than the everyday realm. Mythological *exempla* could be employed to praise virtues that were consistent with the traditional Latin *laudatio*, although at times they could also be used to introduce a new focus on more personal values of erotic love and desirability.

Greek Myths, Roman Virtues: The Visual *laudatio*

In order to explore some of these ideas further I will look first at sarcophagi where myths are used to exemplify the traditional virtues of *pietas*, *virtus* and *paideia*. All these cases are in a sense unusual, in that they include inscriptions or portrait features which help to make explicit the link

⁴⁹ *Ad Marciam* 12.3.

⁵⁰ *Ad Marciam* 12.6–15.4; 16.3–4; 20.4–6; compare the use of historical and imperial *exempla* in *Ad Polybium* 14.3–16.3.

⁵¹ Statius, *Silvae* 2.1, 2.6, 3.3, 5.1, 5.3, 5.5; see further Newby 2014. On Statius' consolations see Manning 1978; van Dam 1984: 63–8; Laguna 1992: 246–52; Gibson 2006: xxxi–l; also Marcus 2004 and Asso 2010: 663–97. On the *Consolatio ad Liviam* see Schoonhoven 1992 and Amat 1997.

⁵² Lattimore 1942: 250–6; Peek 1955.



Figure 6.1 Sarcophagus of Metilia Acte, showing the myth of Alcestis. Vatican, Museo Chiaramonti inv. 1195.

Metilia Acte, coniunx sanctissima

D. M.
C. IVNIVS PAL. EVHODVS MAGISTER QQ.
COLLEGI FABR. TIGN. OSTIS. LUSTRI XXI
FECIT SIBI ET METILIAE ACTE SACERDO
TI M. D. M. COLON. OST. COIVG. SANCTISSIM.

C. Junius Euhodus of the Palatina tribe, five-year magistrate of the twenty-first *lustrum* of the guild of carpenters at Ostia, made [it] for himself and for Metilia Acte, priestess of the Great Mother of the Gods of the colony of Ostia, most pious wife.⁵⁴

The reference to the twenty-first *lustrum* dates the sarcophagus to the period of AD 158–163, a dating that is confirmed by details of the portrait styles, which combine the hairstyle of Lucius Verus, common from around AD 160, on the head of Admetus, with female hairstyles similar to those of the early Antonine period, c. AD 140–150 (on the figure of Alcestis) as well as a later style similar to that of Faustina the Younger from c. AD 152 on the head of one of the female mourners.⁵⁵ The earlier hairstyle on the head of

⁵⁴ *CIL* XIV.371.

⁵⁵ On the portraits and the dating of the sarcophagus see especially Fittschen 1984: 141–3, 160 n. 46.

Alcestis may suggest that the deceased had already died some time before the sarcophagus was commissioned, though it is also possible that she chose to continue wearing a hairstyle that was somewhat old-fashioned in current court circles. The addition of the hairstyle and the lined face of Alcestis is a clear indication that we are to see this figure as embodying not just the mythological character, but also the real woman who was buried within. It is also notable that her head lies just beneath the reference to Metilia on the inscription as *CO[N]IUG[I] SANCTISSIM[AE]*, ‘most pious wife’. *Sanctus* is a word with a wide range of meanings including holy, sacred and inviolate. Here it might suggest the sacred status of the dead as when the same phrase, *sanctissima coniunx*, is used of his dead wife by Evander in the *Aeneid*, to suggest her good fortune at being already dead and thus spared the sight of the death of their son, Pallas.⁵⁶ However, when applied to people it can also convey moral qualities of piety, purity and innocence.⁵⁷ While its use within the inscription ties in with the reference to Metilia Acte as a priestess of the Magna Mater and also her predeceased status, it gains further resonances when seen in the light of the imagery beneath it.

Here Metilia is shown in the guise of that paragon of wifely *pietas*, Alcestis, the wife who chose to die before her time so that her husband might live. The imagery can be seen as the visual proof of her status as *sanctissima*, an assertion that Metilia was as pious, loyal and chaste a wife as Alcestis, and that her death caused as great a sense of grief to her family as did Alcestis’ death. The imagery then further fleshes out her virtues, the presence of children suggesting fertility and motherhood, while the scene of Alcestis’ return to Admetus by Heracles at the right of the sarcophagus may also hark back to the time when she was a young bride, shown here without portrait features and in the heavy veil of the bride.⁵⁸ Euhodus is also praised through his assimilation to Admetus, who appears here as a vigorous figure, rushing in after a hunting trip, while his handshake with Heracles also suggests the role of the welcoming host and embodies the quality of *concordia*.

The mythological narrative is not elided by these references to the qualities of the deceased. Indeed, it is asserted through the fleeing presence of the god Apollo, desperate to avoid the contamination of death,

⁵⁶ Vergil, *Aeneid* 11.158. Horsfall 2003b: 136 suggests connotations of divinisation.

⁵⁷ Lewis and Short 1945: 1625, s.v. *sanctus*.

⁵⁸ I am more sceptical about reading this as a confident assertion of Metilia’s rebirth, as Wood 1978/1993 does, because of the fact that portrait features are not shown here, though it is possible that some viewers could have read it this way.

as in Euripides' *Alcestis*, and in the figures of Persephone and Pluto at the right end of the relief, which assert the funerary message of the sarcophagus as a whole.⁵⁹ However, the mythological narrative is expressed through particular visual types which also allow it to refer to the grief of the bereaved, through the similarities to non-mythological *conclamatio* scenes, and through the portrait heads and positioning of the figure of Alcestis right beneath the inscription, as a clear *exemplum* proving the eulogistic intention of the sarcophagus to assert the sanctity and wifely perfection of Metilia Acte.

Concordia, pietas and virtus: Myth and realia on a Sarcophagus in Berlin

An unusual sarcophagus in Berlin merges the worlds of myth and the everyday through an individualised iconography that pairs two scenes taken from the repertoire of the *Vita Romana* sarcophagi with a hunting scene drawn from the iconography of the myth of Adonis (fig. 6.2).⁶⁰ The left end of this sarcophagus reverses the usual order of the *Vita Romana* sarcophagi and shows at the far left the figure of a man and woman joined by a *pronuba* in a *dextrarum iunctio*, symbolising their *concordia* in marriage. Both have portrait faces which can be assumed to represent the features of the deceased buried within the sarcophagus and those of his wife.⁶¹ The man wears closely cropped hair and beard in a military style while the woman's hair is parted in the middle and drawn back behind in a typical Severan female style; both portraits are compatible with a date around the turn of the second to third centuries AD.⁶²

Further along, just to the left of the centre of the relief, the man appears again in military dress, offering a sacrifice. The portrait head on this figure differs slightly from the other, and shows signs of reworking. Reinsberg suggests that it may originally have been left unfinished, and was later

⁵⁹ Euripides, *Alcestis* 22–3.

⁶⁰ Berlin, Antikensammlung inv. 1987.2. I have drawn here particularly on the stimulating article by Brilliant 1992; see also Blome 1990 and Zanker and Ewald 2004: 292–4, no. 6; 2012: 301–3, no. 7.

⁶¹ It is possible that the sarcophagus could have contained the bodies of both: it measures 1.01 (h) × 2.15 (l) × 0.99 (d). On sarcophagi for couples see Birk 2013: 22–6, suggesting a substantial number of dual burials in sarcophagi with portraits, though outnumbered by single burials. Borg 2013: 203–6 argues strongly for multiple burials in sarcophagi but seems to assume that all those shown in portraits would have been entombed within, which Birk suggests was not always the case.

⁶² Blome 1990, followed by Ewald in Zanker and Ewald 2004: 294; 2012: 305–6.



Figure 6.2 Sarcophagus merging scenes of the *Vita Romana* with the myth of Adonis. Berlin, Antikensammlung inv. 1987.2.

completed for a second occupant, but it is also possible that an existing portrait was later reworked to accommodate the addition of another body to the sarcophagus, and that the figure was originally intended to represent the same figure as the man in the marriage scene.⁶³ I will here take this scenario as the most likely, though in either case the messages about the possibilities of myth to stand in for core Roman values would not be much changed. The combination in this figure of dress and action exemplifies his military courage and his piety, suggesting that he is an archetypal good general, who repays the gods for his military success with deference.

Other sarcophagi of the *Vita Romana* type usually complement these scenes of *concordia* and *pietas* with another representation of the deceased in military dress, shown at the left end granting mercy to the conquered, a symbol of his clemency (fig. 6.3).⁶⁴ On the Berlin sarcophagus, however, the rest of the frieze moves the action from the world of everyday Rome

⁶³ See Reinsberg 2006: 26–9. Her argument that the central portrait has been reworked is persuasive, though the smaller dimensions of this face suggest to me a reworking from an existing face rather than an unfinished one. I am not convinced by her argument that the other portraits were also added to the sarcophagus after its completion. Borg 2013: 204–5 argues that other *Vita Romana* sarcophagi might have been designed to accommodate multiple burials.

⁶⁴ Mantua, Palazzo Ducale inv. 186; Reinsberg 2006: no. 33. Rodenwaldt 1935: 8 reads this scene as expressing both the military *virtus* of the commander and his *clementia*, though Muth 2004 argues that it should represent a single attribute, which she identifies as *imperium*.

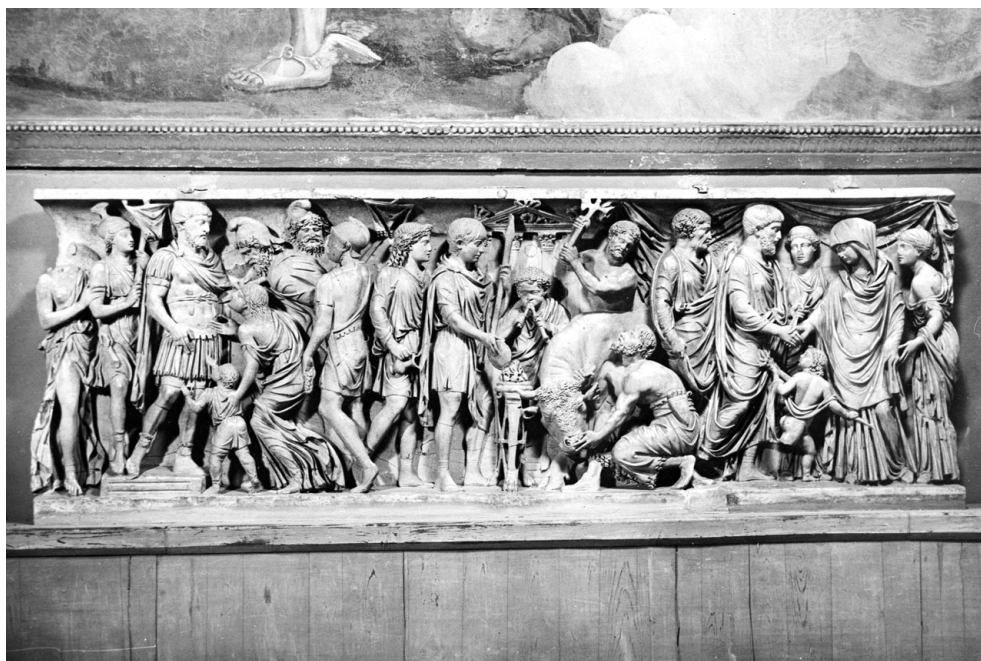


Figure 6.3 *Vita Romana* sarcophagus, Mantua, Palazzo Ducale inv. 186.

to that of the mythological sphere, with an image of a young hero fallen in the path of a boar, and surrounded by other hunters. This scene is usually found on sarcophagi with the myth of Adonis where it depicts the hero's fatal hunting trip and untimely death (fig. 6.4).⁶⁵ Hunting scenes are a particularly popular theme on Roman sarcophagi. They appear in the second century in mythological guise in the stories of Adonis, Meleager and Hippolytus, as well as in the non-mythological hunt sarcophagi which emerge in the early third century and which usually replace the boar with a lion.⁶⁶ In all of these the association of the hero with hunting seems to reinforce the message of his manly *virtus* and courage, which could then be projected onto the deceased buried within, while the Adonis myth also adds to this an edge of pathos as we see his ensuing death.⁶⁷

On this sarcophagus, the scene replaces the more usual scene of the general dispensing clemency; it gives an alternative image of heroism but also evokes pathos through the lost promise of the ill-fated youth. When seen

⁶⁵ Mantua, Palazzo Ducale; Grassinger 1999: no. 55.

⁶⁶ For accounts of these groups see Robert 1904; Koch 1975; Grassinger 1999; Andrae 1980.

⁶⁷ As noted by Grassinger 1998: 555.



Figure 6.4 Sarcophagus with the myth of Adonis, Mantua, Palazzo Ducale.

against the backdrop of other *Vita Romana* sarcophagi the episode of Adonis seems to allude to the *virtus* of the dead man. The message of the sarcophagus as a whole can be read as an assertion of his virtues and achievements, similar to those we find in *laudationes* or in Seneca's reference to the achievements of Marcia's son.⁶⁸ Here too the deceased is shown to be a loving husband and a pious official, expressed through these archetypal images of *concordia* and *pietas*. Yet his *virtus* is instead exemplified through reference to a mythological *exemplum*, as if the orator had suddenly moved away from the actual achievements of the deceased, to show how he measured up in a wider field; asserting that his *virtus* was such that he was the equal even of Adonis who, despite his beauty and skill in hunting, could not escape an early death. The mythological comparison serves both to illustrate and exalt the *virtus* of the deceased through comparison to the mythological prototype, but through the choice of Adonis rather than Hippolytus or Meleager, it also allows for a consolatory message, that if

⁶⁸ *Ad Marciam* 12.3.

even the heroes of old could not escape death, what hope was there for him?⁶⁹

Indeed, when looked at as a consolation, the message of the sarcophagus also gains a further level of resonance. It can be seen against the backdrop of other *Vita Romana* sarcophagi, as I have shown above. Yet by the time the sarcophagus was commissioned, viewers could also be expected to reflect on the comparison with the standard iconography of the Adonis sarcophagi, from which the right end draws. On these, the scene of Adonis' wounding in the hunt at the right is paired to the left with a scene of his departure from Aphrodite (fig. 6.4). The pillar which on the Berlin sarcophagus divides the 'real' from the 'mythological' realm is also found there, as the division between the internal space of the home and the outside world of the hunt. A recognition of the fallen hero on the Berlin sarcophagus as Adonis thus carries with it memory of his lover, Aphrodite, from whom he departs. This may then invest the figure of the wife on the Berlin sarcophagus with further resonance; like Aphrodite she too has lost a beloved man, and the consolation that even heroes die young may be offered to her, and even, on analogy with an inscription from Rome, to the dead man himself.⁷⁰

The Qualities of Children: *Pietas* and *paideia*

As a further example of the ways myths could be used to exemplify particular virtues, I will look at two images that commemorated children. Again they are unusual cases, and we must be cautious about assuming that the ways myths are here used as *exempla* of particular virtues or qualities can be applied more broadly across the board.⁷¹ Yet they do reveal the existence of a mode of using myths that saw them as a means to lay claim to Roman virtues.

⁶⁹ For an example of this theme in poetry see Propertius 3.19.27: 'Beauty did not save Nireus, nor his strength Achilles.'

⁷⁰ IG XIV.1806; CIL VI.21278; Vatican Museo Lapidaria. This inscription reads as follows: Latin: 'To the spirits of the departed. To C. Licinius Midon, well-deserving, Grania Epictesis made it for her sweet husband.' The words 'sweet husband' seem to have been added later, and a Greek inscription was also added in the margins of the inscription, reading: 'Be of good cheer, Midon, no-one is immortal; even Herakles died.' Compare *Epigr. Gr.* 567: 'No-one is immortal. Theseus and the Aiacidai are proof, Severa, of what I say'; Lattimore 1942: 253–4.

⁷¹ Ewald in Zanker and Ewald 2012: 303 describes the Berlin *Vita Romana*/Adonis sarcophagus as 'a key work for the interpretation of mythological sarcophagi', but note the cautions in Newby 2011 that additions of portraits or other variations on standard iconography often work to change more normative readings of a myth; similar ideas in Zanker 2012.



Figure 6.5 *Loculus* plaque showing the story of Cleobis and Biton. Venice, Museo Archeologico.

The first is actually not a sarcophagus at all but a *loculus* plaque designed to cover the opening of a grave (fig. 6.5). It is decorated with the tale of Cleobis and Biton, depicted here not as youths but as young children whose faces bear the portraits of two Roman boys. Their mother too is given portrait features and a waved coiffure, similar to that of the Younger Faustina, dating the piece to the AD 160s.⁷² The story of Cleobis and Biton is well known through its retelling in Herodotus' *Histories*.⁷³ According to this when their mother wished to attend a festival of Hera at Argos and the oxen for her chariot were still in the field, her sons instead yoked themselves to the chariot and pulled it all the way to Argos. After their mother prayed to the goddess that she might bestow on them the highest blessing, they went into the temple and fell asleep, never to wake up.

The left end of the image shows the mother in her chariot and the two boys holding onto the yoke, though here the oxen are also present in front

⁷² Venice, Museo Archeologico. Fittschen 1970; Sperti 1988: 142–51, no. 43; also Zanker and Ewald 2004: 216–17; 2012: 215–16.

⁷³ Herodotus 1.31. While we would not strictly call this story a myth, it is treated here in the same way as other mythological tales.

of the cart, while the centre of the relief shows them asleep on the floor as their mother raises a burning torch in front of the temple. The images to the right move further from the story to show them at the head of a horse-drawn chariot and, to the far right, in their mother's embrace. While the first two episodes allude to Herodotus' narrative, those to the right instead suggest the hope of immortality for these two boys, as well as asserting the maternal love that their mother feels for them. The relief as a whole is heavily Romanised, especially clear in the depiction of the prostyle Corinthian temple.

The physical prowess of the boys, a key feature in Herodotus' account where they are also said to have won a number of athletic victories at festivals, is here underplayed both in their childish physiognomy and in the presence of the oxen, which were supposed to be absent. Instead, the focus is on the mother's religious piety, as evidenced by her veneration at the temple, and on their filial duty and piety towards her, shown in the attendance on her chariot, as well as her affection for them. This reading of the story tallies closely with the reference to it that we find in Valerius Maximus' *Memorable Doings and Sayings*. There he includes the story of Cleobis and Biton among examples of the piety of children towards their parents.⁷⁴ This quality of *pietas* can also often be found commemorated on the epitaphs of children from their parents where it seems to express the very Roman idea of obedience and duty to one's parents.⁷⁵ The relief acts as a visual assertion of the dutiful *pietas* of these two boys as comparable to that of Cleobis and Biton, as well as praising their mother's religious devotion. It asserts the close bond between mother and her children and, through the presence of the horse-drawn chariot, also expresses the hope that they might find immortality in another realm. While the imagery acts as a memorial to both the boys and their mother, the small size of the plaque suggests that it serves to close the grave of the boys alone.⁷⁶

While this relief asserts the virtue of filial *pietas*, my second example radically changes the usual iconography of a mythological subject to make it serve to express the qualities of the deceased and the grief of his parents.

⁷⁴ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 5.4 (ext.) 4.

⁷⁵ Sigismund Nielsen 1997: 178, table 8.5 shows that 25 per cent of the epitaphs for children studied feature the epithet *pientissimus*. The Roman obsession on filial obedience can be seen through its frequent appearance as a theme in rhetorical *controversiae* where the budding orator is often charged with debating the merits of competing claims of filial devotion; see further Beard 1993; Imber 2008.

⁷⁶ The plaque measures 64 × 147 cm: Sperti 1988: 142.



Figure 6.6 Sarcophagus with the myth of Hippolytus, Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 112444.

This is a Hippolytus sarcophagus in the Museo Nazionale Romano, dated to the late third century AD, a period in which mythological scenes had generally declined on Roman sarcophagi in favour of other themes.⁷⁷ Paul Zanker has shown how this sarcophagus changes the usual iconography of the myth to stress two particular aspects, relevant to the desired representation of the deceased – the *paideia* of the hero, shown through the prominent appearance of him holding a diptych just to the left of centre, and the grief of his parents, here equated with the figures of Phaedra and Theseus (fig. 6.6).⁷⁸

The traditional iconography of the Hippolytus sarcophagi produced earlier in Rome focusses on two main scenes: Hippolytus' departure from Phaedra at the left end, and his *virtus* in the hunt, on the right (fig. 6.7). Aspects of the traditional narrative, best known to us through Euripides' play, are indicated through the figure of the nurse who approaches Hippolytus, but elsewhere the Greek myth is twisted to suit a Roman funerary message. Hippolytus' gesture of rejection can be read instead as one of

⁷⁷ Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 112444.

⁷⁸ Zanker 1999b.



Figure 6.7 Hippolytus sarcophagus, Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Profano inv. 10400.

departure, and Phaedra's grief at her hopeless incestuous love as grief at Hippolytus' leave-taking. The rest of the scene focusses especially on Hippolytus' beauty and courage, likening the deceased to this epitome of youthful *virtus*.⁷⁹

The later sarcophagus (fig. 6.6) preserves some features of the earlier series. Phaedra's grief is alluded to through her turned head, while Hippolytus' *virtus* is indicated through the inclusion of his horse, hounds and hunting companions. However, it also adds a number of new features. The figure of Hippolytus is turned outwards to confront the viewer frontally, rather than being seen in profile or three-quarters view. This has the effect of removing him somewhat from the mythological narrative of which he forms a part. His spear, chlamys and sword belt fit him for the hunt, but he also holds a diptych prominently in front of his chest. On a mythological reading this can be seen as the ill-fated love letter, sent by Phaedra, but at a visual level that reading does not really work. Hippolytus is not

⁷⁹ See Ewald 2011: 274–80 on the reframing of the myth on Roman sarcophagi.

shown rejecting the letter, but instead holds it up. He is also given the roughed-out portrait features which we find on a number of other sarcophagi that suggest a direct attempt to link the deceased with the hero.⁸⁰ The prominence of the diptych suggests his education and *paideia*; he is shown as a youth of learning, as well as action. Indeed, this presentation of the *paideia* of a young man has resonances with both earlier biographical sarcophagi and the contemporary taste for sarcophagi showing images of philosophers and the Muses.⁸¹

On earlier sarcophagi we often see scenes of the childhood and education of the deceased, watched by their family. The sarcophagus of M. Cornelius Statius in the Louvre shows a series of childhood scenes from the father watching his wife nursing and carrying his son, to the older child driving a ram-drawn chariot and declaiming in front of his father.⁸² The way in which his father watches his performance is comparable to the position of Theseus on this later Hippolytus sarcophagus. This figure is a third-century addition to the iconography of the sarcophagi. While he can be seen as Theseus receiving the news of his son's death, the visual presentation also likens him to a father watching his son's performance at the centre of the relief. The scene also includes a woman carrying a baby just to the left of Theseus, which again evokes the iconography of *Vita Privata* sarcophagi and does not fit well with the mythological narrative.⁸³ The figure of Phaedra is also given roughed-out portrait features, a move that seems aimed at equating her with a woman bereaved by the loss of a youth comparable to Hippolytus. The pairing of female and male at either end of the sarcophagus compares these figures to a married couple, suggesting that Phaedra may have been designed to evoke the mother of the deceased youth, and especially her grief at his death.⁸⁴

The sarcophagus thus adapts the earlier iconography of the myth to add a number of extra resonances, allowing it to be read simultaneously on

⁸⁰ For discussions of portrait and unfinished heads see Schauenburg 1980; Fittschen 1984; Andreae 1984b; Huskinson 1998; Fejfer 2008: 133–5; and Newby 2011: esp. 198–9.

⁸¹ On these see Marrou 1938; Wegner 1966; Ewald 1999b.

⁸² Louvre inv. MA 659; Amedick 1991: no. 114.

⁸³ Zanker 1999b: 132 interprets her as one of Phaedra's attendants, who brought news of her death to Theseus, as in Euripides, *Hippolytus* 776–87; see also Robert 1904: 200, no. 161.

⁸⁴ A similar reworking of an erotic myth to express the love of a mother for her son can be seen in the roughly contemporary Theseus sarcophagus in Cliveden, dedicated by a mother to her son, where the mother's features are added to the figure of the abandoned Ariadne. See Zanker and Ewald 2004: 378–81, no. 36 = Zanker and Ewald 2012: 404–8, no. 36. On Phaedra as the epitome of a grieving female see Linant de Bellefonds 2013.

two levels, the mythological and the human. Hippolytus now is not just a beautiful and heroic hunter, but also an intellectual, and his loss is felt by both parents. The introduction of Theseus at the right end allows him to stand not only for the bereaved father, who receives news of the deaths of both wife and son, but also as a proud father in the mould of earlier *Vita Privata* sarcophagi, watching the achievements of his growing child. The success of this new iconography in the late third century can be seen through its appearance on other sarcophagi now in Split and Paris.⁸⁵ While those sarcophagi show idealised faces for all the mythological figures, the addition of portrait features here makes the message of the sarcophagus more acute, and also allows a consolatory message to the bereaved to be added to its eulogistic assertion of the physical and mental prowess of the deceased. Through a roughed-out portrait, the mother’s grief is directly compared to that of Phaedra, stressing the use of the myth as a mythological prototype for grief, as well as for youthful promise.

‘As in life, so in myth . . .’: Mythological Analogies for Grief

We have seen above how mythological sarcophagi often use visual typologies that can also be used in non-mythological scenes to relate the mythological narrative to the virtues and values of the deceased.⁸⁶ Here, I want to look in closer detail at one of the strategies that sarcophagi employ to suggest the interplay between the real and the mythological, focussing on scenes of grief, which are particularly common in the earliest sarcophagi and are an aspect of the mythological sarcophagi that relates them especially closely to verse consolations, such as those of Statius.⁸⁷ One of the major achievements of Zanker and Ewald’s volume is to draw attention to the messages sarcophagi presented to the bereaved; in particular, Paul Zanker has related the popularity of scenes of the deaths of the Niobids and Creusa and the rapes of Persephone and the Leucippidae to the need to express the horror and shock of bereavement, and console those left behind.⁸⁸ While these myths can work at the level of general analogy to

⁸⁵ Split, Museo Archeologico inv. D29; Louvre inv. MA 2294; Robert 1904: nos. 163, 161; Zanker 1999b: 141 n. 36.

⁸⁶ See also Stilp 2013 and Koortbojian 2013 for the typological overlaps between different categories of sarcophagi.

⁸⁷ Newby 2011.

⁸⁸ Zanker and Ewald 2004: 63–115; 2012: 57–109; building on ideas in Blome 1978 and Fittschen 1992.

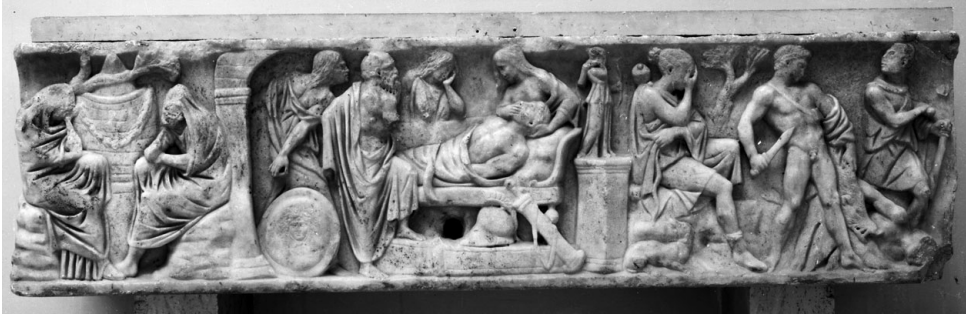


Figure 6.8 Meleager sarcophagus, Ostia, Museo Nazionale inv. 101.

the sudden loss of a loved one, on some mythological grief and mourning are specifically related to the experience of the bereaved through the inclusion of scenes that are ambiguous, seeming to belong to the real world of the bereaved as much as to the mythological situation portrayed.

This is especially clear on a child sarcophagus in Ostia, which shows the death of Meleager (fig. 6.8).⁸⁹ Dated to around AD 160, it is among the earliest sarcophagi to feature the myth of Meleager, the most popular single narrative subject on Roman sarcophagi. The majority of these sarcophagi focus on Meleager in the hunt scene, but a group of ten sarcophagi, including the earliest pieces, stress instead the pathos of his early death, showing Meleager on his death-bed.⁹⁰ The centre of the Ostia sarcophagus is dominated by a scene of the laying out of Meleager's body, surrounded by his grieving family. His identification as Meleager is made clear by the scene to the right, which shows episodes from earlier in the myth, discussed further below. To the left, however, is a scene that seems timeless. Either side of a circular tomb, hung with garlands, sits a couple, a heavily draped woman to the left and a bearded man to the right, both with their heads bowed in grief. They are separated from the mythological scene to the right by an arch, showing that they belong to a different level of reality. In their poses and position outside the tomb they surely evoke the bereaved parents of the child buried within the sarcophagus. Indeed, poetic consolations to the bereaved often picture them in precisely this pose, as we see in Statius' poem on the death of his father where he pictures himself as leaning against his father's tomb (*acclinis tumulo*) while he composes his poem,

⁸⁹ Ostia, Museo Nazionale inv. 101; Koch 1975: no. 112.

⁹⁰ The Meleager sarcophagi are catalogued by Koch 1975. For a particular focus on the death-bed sarcophagi see Lorenz 2011.

and later compares his grief to that of a bereaved mother sitting over her son's warm mound (*quae tepido genetrix super aggere nati / orba sedet*).⁹¹

This scene of familial grief is paired on the other side of the arch with a mythological prototype, the grief of Meleager's father and sisters as they prepare his body for burial. At the right we move back in time, to the events that actually led to Meleager's death. According to the myth this was the result of his actions during the Calydonian boar hunt. In the course of a quarrel over the awarding of the boar's hide, which Meleager wished to award to his lover, Atalanta, he killed his uncles. To avenge the death of her brothers, his mother, Altheia, then cast into the fire a log with which Meleager's own life was enmeshed, bringing about his death. Other examples of the type often show the scene of Altheia to the left, in the place here taken by the grieving parents, and show Meleager's killing of his uncles at the right, as on a sarcophagus in the Louvre.⁹² Here, too, Meleager is shown with a sword in hand, while a corpse lies at his feet. Yet the emphasis is subtly changed. While other sarcophagi show the surviving uncle at the right drawing his sword in response to Meleager, he is here omitted and replaced instead with the figure of a slave. The corpse at Meleager's feet is shown as beardless and therefore not identified with one of the uncles, who are usually shown as bearded. The composition also moves the figure of the mourning Atalanta, who usually appears further to the left as part of the *conclamatio* scene. Here she is instead positioned as a witness to Meleager's ill-fated heroism. Foreseeing his death, she grieves for the loss of her brave lover. This depiction portrays Meleager as a heroic hunter, skating over the reasons for his death.

Through its juxtaposition of the grieving parents with the scenes lamenting Meleager's death, the sarcophagus encourages us to read the myth as a metaphor for the real grief of the parents of the child buried within. It asserts that their grief is as deep as that of the family of Meleager, and suggests that they too have experienced just as deep a loss. The image of Atalanta and Meleager at the right end seems to extend the image, asserting that the dead child was full of bravery and potential and perhaps lamenting the fact that he died before he could achieve the joys of love and marriage, just as Meleager and Atalanta's love was thwarted by the hero's untimely death. As we saw on the Berlin sarcophagus discussed above, here too the everyday and the mythological realms are divided by an arch, encouraging us to see the scenes represented as existing at different levels of reality.

⁹¹ Statius, *Silvae* 5.3.36, 65–6.

⁹² Paris, Louvre MA 539; Koch 1975: no. 116.



Figure 6.9 Niobids sarcophagus, right short side. Musei Vaticani, Museo Gregoriano Profano inv. 10437.

This sarcophagus is not alone in its combination of a mythological scene with one that directly alludes to the grief of the relatives of the deceased. A Meleager sarcophagus in Istanbul includes a similar scene on the right short side, though here the scene is treated in lower relief and the bereaved both appear to be female.⁹³ Another detailed representation can be found on the right short side of a sarcophagus in the Vatican which shows on the front the violent deaths of the Niobids (*fig. 6.9*).⁹⁴ Here a draped female figure sits outside a tholos tomb, draped with garlands, while a man dressed in the garb of a shepherd stands in front of her. She can be read as

⁹³ Istanbul Archaeological Museum inv. 2100; Koch 1975: no. 81; Zanker and Ewald 2004: 353–5, no. 27; 2012: 366–9, no. 24; Newby 2014: 271–2, figs. 8.3–8.4.

⁹⁴ Musei Vaticani, Museo Gregoriano Profano inv. 10437; Robert 1919: no. 315; Zanker and Ewald 2004: 357–9, no. 29; 2012: 372–4, no. 26. Herdejürgen 1996: 37–40 dates it to AD 130–140.

representing Niobe, who famously mourned her children so deeply that she turned to stone, but the detailed depiction of the tomb also suggests more contemporary resonances, likening her grief to that of the relatives of the person buried within. Through its ambiguous status between myth and reality it seems to serve as an entrance point to the mythological imagery, prompting the viewer to compare the grief of the bereaved with that of Niobe who suffered such a great and violent loss.⁹⁵ The fact that this short side is so highly finished, in contrast to the opposite end, which was less finely finished, suggests that the sculptor at least intended for it to be seen. He may have conceived it as standing against the right wall of a tomb, where it would confront the viewer, offering an entrance into the mythological analogy on the front. In the result, however, the sarcophagus was not displayed in this way. This is one of the few sarcophagi for which we do have information on its display and it was set into a niche on the left side of a tomb, where the short sides were not visible.⁹⁶ As elsewhere, there is an apparent mismatch between a potential reading of the imagery, which its composition seems to point to, and the reality of how it was viewed, at least once placed within the tomb.

Euphemisms for Death: Placing the Dead in Paradise

In the previous two sections we have seen how sarcophagi can be read as eulogies of the merits of the deceased, or as mythological analogies for the grief of the bereaved. Here I want to look at another consolatory aspect of mythological sarcophagi; the way in which they suggest a happy afterlife for the deceased that could help to alleviate the grief of the deceased. Recent scholarship has revived the question of how much sarcophagi allude to the eschatological beliefs of the deceased or bereaved; while Jean-Charles Balty suggests that the eastern backgrounds of many sarcophagus buyers could have inclined them towards positive assertions about the afterlife, Martin Galinier suggests that in many cases these suggestions of apotheosis remain

⁹⁵ On the subject of entrance points into the mythological imagery compare also the comments of Lorenz 2011: 320–6, who sees the figure of Atalanta on Meleager sarcophagi as acting as a ‘gateway’ figure linking the mythological and the everyday worlds.

⁹⁶ See Bielfeldt 2003: 143–9; 2005: 306–21 on this tomb. Herdejürgen 1996: 37–8 suggests that the Niobid sarcophagus and the Orestes sarcophagus opposite may not have been made specifically for this tomb since both are elevated on supports, unlike the Medusa sarcophagus on the central back wall, though she thinks they were all bought together at the same time as the tomb was built.

in the conditional rather than the affirmative mode.⁹⁷ Here I argue that the positive visions of the afterlife that we see on mythological sarcophagi can be seen as visual versions of the sorts of consolatory expressions we find in funerary poetry, taking as my parallel a lengthy inscription from Rome. This describes the moment when a grieving man was visited by the apparition of his dead relative *Nepos*, and urged to cease his tears, with the assertion that the dead *Nepos* was now a god. Below is a slightly abridged version of the text:

Sextus Onussianus Com . . . , son of Sextus, to the memory of Marcus Lucceius *Nepos*, son of Marcus.

When I was lamenting my loss of *Nepos* through premature death . . . I saw a shape . . . glide down from the sky. That was no dream, but the man had his actual complexion and voice, though his stature was greater than the familiar shape of his body . . . He spoke from his rosy lips: ‘My noble kinsman, why do you complain that I have been snatched away to the stars of the sky? Cease to bewail a god lest your affection, unaware that I have been welcomed in the celestial abode, may mourn and by its sorrow distress a supernatural being. I shall not gloomily make my way to the underworld streams and shall not as a ghost be ferried across the waters of Acheron . . . Rise, tell my mother not to lament me night and day, as the mourning Attic mother does *Itys*. For holy *Venus* has forbidden me to know the abodes of the silent and has carried me to the bright halls of heaven’. I jumped up and trembling had pervaded my cold limbs; the place was fragrant, redolent with a sweet smell. Sanctified *Nepos*, the whole heavenly chorus will welcome you, whether, escorted by a crowd of *amorini*, you happily mingle with the amusements of *Adonis*, or you rejoice in the crowd of the *Muses* or in the artistic skill of *Athena*. If you should want to fasten heavy clusters of ivy-berries to the *thyrsus* and veil your hair with vine-shoots, you will be *Bacchus*; if you should want to grow your hair and garland it with bay and take up bow and quiver, you will be *Apollo*. Put on fine sleeves and a *Phrygian* (cap), more than one love will quicken in *Cybele*’s breast. Should you desire to shake the mouth of a foaming horse with the bridle, then *Cyllarus* will carry the body of a handsome rider. But whatever god, whatever demigod you shall be called, may your sister, mother and your son be safe and sound. These gifts, which gnawing time and [. . .] do not take away, are better than perfume and garlands.⁹⁸

This is a fascinating text, providing a lengthy assertion of continuing existence after death that acts as a consolation to the grief of the bereaved.

⁹⁷ Balty 2013; Galinier 2013: 106.

⁹⁸ *CIL* VI.21521 = *CIL* VI.34137 = *CLE* 1109; translation Courtney 1995: no. 183; possibly Flavian though Courtney 1995: 381 on line 1 argues for a late date. Lattimore 1942: 39–40 suggests the first century AD.

Unlike the large numbers of short, prose epitaphs which assert that death is the end of everything, this poetic inscription pictures the deceased in a better place. Nepos asserts to his grieving relative that he is not in the Underworld, but is rather a god, *deus*, in the sky, where Sextus imagines him taking on the roles of Adonis, Bacchus, Apollo, Attis and Castor, as well as mingling freely with cupids and Muses. The stress on Nepos' appearance in these assimilations to different deities evokes the statues of the deceased in the guise of different gods which begin to appear in the Neronian period.⁹⁹ We know from both literary and archaeological evidence that some individuals could be commemorated by statues showing them in a variety of forms. According to Statius' description of it, the tomb of Abascantus' wife, Priscilla, contained images of Priscilla in the guise of Ceres, Ariadne, Maia and Venus, while the tomb of Claudia Semne along the Via Appia apparently contained images of her in the guise of Fortuna, Spes and Venus, though only a statue of her as Spes was found.¹⁰⁰ Both women were the wives of imperial freedmen, of Domitian and Trajan respectively, a group which Wrede sees as particularly linked with the origins of these sorts of private deifications. The inscription to Nepos comes from the area outside the Porta Portuense at Rome where it was probably set up on a tomb, and it is possible that the tomb itself contained images of Nepos in the various guises the epigram imagines.

Wrede sees such images as examples of private deifications of the deceased, and indeed a number of inscriptions refer to the deceased as god or godlike, just as Nepos here identifies himself as a god (*deus*). However, in Nepos' comment that he does not linger in fear in the Underworld, the inscription also evokes the themes of consolations, both prose and verse. In Seneca's consolations the grief of the bereaved is assuaged by the idea that their beloved is not in the Underworld but has rather entered into the stars, while in Statius' consolations the poet comforts the bereaved by painting a more positive picture of the Underworld. *Silvae* 2.1 pictures Glaucias in the Underworld with Melior's dead friend Blaesus, while 5.1 has Priscilla welcomed by ancient heroines.¹⁰¹ We also saw in the [last chapter](#) how the imagery of the Tomb of the Nasonii offered the consolation that the deceased could be welcomed into the Underworld by both familial and poetic ancestors.

⁹⁹ See Wrede 1981.

¹⁰⁰ Statius, *Silvae* 5.1.232–3; Gibson 2006: 163 discusses the identification as Ariadne or Diana. On Claudia Semne's tomb see Wrede 1978; also Wrede 1981: 83–4.

¹⁰¹ Statius, *Silvae* 2.1.189–207; 5.1.247–62.

The consolatory potential of envisaging the deceased residing in a mythological realm was fully exploited on sarcophagi. Two of the most popular themes on mythological sarcophagi are marine imagery and Dionysiac scenes, while scenes of Eroses make up a smaller but significant group.¹⁰² These are all set in a general mythological realm rather than relating specific narratives, though a sub-set of Dionysiac sarcophagi focusses on the god discovering the abandoned Ariadne, with whom the deceased can be assimilated through the addition of portrait features. In general, however, these scenes evoke a general atmosphere of joyous revelry and eroticism that is open to a variety of interpretations, evoking both the joys of life and the hope that the deceased will continue to experience these in the afterlife.¹⁰³ In a few third-century pieces, portrait faces directly assimilate the deceased to a mythological character, such as Heracles on a Dionysus sarcophagus in Woburn Abbey, and the drunken Dionysus on a strigillated sarcophagus in the Praetextatus catacombs in Rome.¹⁰⁴ In the vast majority of cases, however, portrait features are not present within the body of the frieze, though busts of the deceased may be carried by sea-centaurs in the marine thiasos scenes, or appear on the lids.¹⁰⁵

Lines 31–4 of Nepos' inscription imagine him welcomed to heaven by a crowd of Amores, or mingling with the Muses. Such imagery appears on Eroses and Muses sarcophagi, where the deceased can be shown in the company of the Muses, sometimes taking the place of one of them, or inserted into the world of Eroses.¹⁰⁶ A sarcophagus in Berlin shows a young girl standing in the middle of a crowd of Cupids who are shown harvesting fruit and wrestling.¹⁰⁷ One of them approaches her, offering a bunch of grapes, though she seems to stare out directly at the viewer. She is shown within the mythological realm but not fully a part of it, suggesting

¹⁰² See Ewald 2003: 564, figs. 1a–d for pie charts showing the proportions. These groups are particularly significant in the second century, yielding in the third to more generalised scenes of the seasons and bucolic imagery.

¹⁰³ Zanker in Zanker and Ewald 2004: 117–77; 2012: 111–73 concentrates especially on resonances with the deceased's past life and the banquets that took place at the tomb, but also allows for the possibility of hopeful messages about the afterlife. On imagery of Elysium/Isles of the Blest see also Engemann 1973: 47–56, noting the difficulty of deciding whether the imagery should be taken as true belief or euphemistic cliché.

¹⁰⁴ Matz 1968b: no. 100; Wrede 1981: no. 181; Zanker and Ewald 2004: 160–1, figs. 145–6; 2012: 156–7, figs. 145–6.

¹⁰⁵ Matz 1975: 453–66; 1971: 102–16.

¹⁰⁶ For discussions see Kranz 1999: 109–13 and Wegner 1966: 128–33.

¹⁰⁷ Berlin, Antikensammlung inv. Sk 855; Kranz 1999: 31–2, 109–10, no. 5; Newby 2014: 284, fig. 8.9.

that the image expresses the consolatory hope that she will find joy in the afterlife, rather than presenting a secure belief in any sort of apotheosis.

When we turn to more specific mythological narratives, here too the use of certain iconographies may have encouraged viewers to see them as a representation of the sort of joyous afterlife which they hoped the deceased would enjoy. The myth of Endymion and Selene is one of the most popular mythological stories, comprising around 110 extant examples. As Sichtermann and Koortbojian have shown, its success may have been due in part to the variety of readings that it could prompt. While Franz Cumont proposed a complex reading of the myth as a metaphor for the apotheosis of the soul and its union with the moon after death, more recent scholars have focussed instead on the analogy between Endymion's endless sleep and death, as well as on the erotic bond between hero and goddess, especially suggestive in those instances where portrait faces are added (around a third of the surviving examples).¹⁰⁸ In the context of consolatory messages to the bereaved the image of the eternally sleeping, beautiful youth offers a prototype with which to compare the experience of the deceased, especially when other elements of bucolic abundance are shown, as they are in a number of the later examples. Yet it is also possible to see the sleeping hero as the bereaved, dreaming of a reunion with his lost lover, which is paralleled in literary and epigraphic references to the bereaved seeing their loved ones in dreams and longing for their own reunion after death.¹⁰⁹ On this reading the descent of a lost wife in the guise of Selene parallels the experience of Nepos' relative, in which he sees Nepos descending to him in a greater than usual stature, and later imagines him in the guise of various different gods.

A similar euphemistic message about the afterlife can also be read in some of the Ariadne sarcophagi. With their similar iconography these can be seen as parallel to the Endymion sarcophagi. Here, however, it is a sleeping woman who is visited and later rescued by a male god, Dionysus. The sarcophagi form a sub-set of the much larger group of Dionysiac sarcophagi and there is a great deal of variety in the emphasis they put on the figure of Ariadne. Unlike the Endymion sarcophagi where portraits can be given to both of the mythological lovers, only Ariadne receives portrait

¹⁰⁸ Cumont 1942: 246–50; for other readings see Sichtermann 1992: 41–53 and Koortbojian 1995: 73–84. On the portraits see Newby 2011: 205–9. See also Platt 2011: 335–93 for a thought-provoking reassessment of scenes of divine epiphanies on sarcophagi.

¹⁰⁹ E.g. *CIL* VI.18817, discussed by Koortbojian 1995: 108, where a wife longs to see her dead husband in her dreams and to be reunited with him in death. Cf. also Statius, *Silvae* 3.3.203–4, where a bereaved son asks for counselling dreams from the portraits of his dead father.



Figure 6.10 Ariadne sarcophagus, Bolsena, Museo Territoriale.

features (in 45 per cent of known cases) while the face of the god remains ideal. This suggests that the focus is less on the married couple and their love or hoped-for reunion in the afterlife, but rather on the experience of Ariadne herself. She is shown sleeping in the midst of Dionysiac revelry.

On some vat-shaped sarcophagi the figure of Ariadne is placed well to the right of the image, sometimes to the right of a lion-head boss and often paired with another reclining figure on the opposite side. Where portrait features are absent there may not be a particular association intended between her and the deceased, but on some the addition of portrait features does suggest an association. A sarcophagus in Bolsena shows Ariadne at the far right, pendant to the image of Tellus to the left, while the centre of the sarcophagus focusses on the figures of Dionysus and Heracles (fig. 6.10).¹¹⁰ Dionysus is not shown here in the act of discovering Ariadne, and instead she is shown simply as resting within this Dionysiac world. While she is not the focal point of the imagery, Ariadne is here given a portrait head of Severan period (fig. 6.11). This serves to link her with the woman buried within, who is envisaged set within the joys of a Dionysiac realm. When viewed from the front the portrait head is barely visible, though its display within the tomb may have made it more so. In particular, if the sarcophagus were placed on the right wall of a tomb the viewer would initially see this nubile figure with a portrait face, and then gradually move around the sarcophagus to discover the Dionysiac setting

¹¹⁰ Matz 1968a: no. 46.



Figure 6.11 Ariadne sarcophagus, Bolsena, Museo Territoriale.

in which she was imaged as existing. Even if the ultimate display of the sarcophagus did not accommodate this viewing, the addition of a portrait head to the figure of Ariadne suggests the desire to equate the deceased with her, and offers the euphemistic hope of an enjoyable experience in the afterlife.

Elsewhere, portrait or unfinished heads can be added to scenes with a clearer stress on the discovery of Ariadne by Dionysus. This is the case with the sarcophagus of the young girl Maconiana Severiana, the daughter of a senatorial couple (fig. 6.12).¹¹¹ The head is roughly sketched out with a Severan hairstyle, but not fully finished. The intention seems to be to suggest the nubile beauty of the young girl, whose early death snatched away from her the possibility of marriage, leaving such hopes to be realised only beyond the grave. Rather than a confident statement of a belief in immortality, this sarcophagus seems instead to offer a euphemistic consolation to the bereaved parents, suggesting the hope that their daughter might find in death the fulfilment that had been taken from her in life.

¹¹¹ J. Paul Getty Museum inv. 83.AA.275; Matz 1969: no. 214. For a detailed discussion see Walker 1990; also Newby 2011: 204.



Figure 6.12 Marble sarcophagus of Maconiana Severiana showing the Discovery of Ariadne. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California. No. 83.AA.275.

‘All the values of classicism’? The Medea Sarcophagus in Basel

In order to draw together these different readings of sarcophagi as *laudationes*, laments and consolations, I will discuss one final sarcophagus showing the myth of Medea. Medea sarcophagi form a small yet puzzling group comprising around twenty chests dating to the second half of the second century AD.¹¹² The lavish piece in Basel is the latest known piece, dated stylistically to the very end of the second century AD (fig. 6.13).¹¹³ These sarcophagi have prompted a number of different responses from scholars seeking to understand the funerary significance of their mythological imagery. Back in 1946 Nock proclaimed that their primary meaning lay in their evocation of classicism and culture, noting the overlap with

¹¹² Gaggadis-Robin 1994.

¹¹³ Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig inv. BS 203; Gaggadis-Robin 1994: no. 24. It shows the typical features of the so-called Late Antonine *Stilwandel*; see Schmidt 1969: esp. 5–6; Zanker and Ewald 2004: 339–41, no. 21; 2012: 357–9, no. 21.



Figure 6.13 Medea sarcophagus. Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig inv. BS 203.

iconography found also in the domestic sphere.¹¹⁴ Later Guntrum Koch questioned what possible funerary meaning could be found in myths such as Medea killing her children or Orestes' slaughter of his mother.¹¹⁵ A year earlier, in fact, Klaus Fittschen had suggested a persuasive reading, which is still largely followed today. He asserted that rather than presenting the myth of Medea, these sarcophagi should be seen instead as focussing on the tragic death of Creusa, the young bride of Jason, whose death takes centre stage on the reliefs.¹¹⁶ He argues in particular against the interpretation of Margot Schmidt who had interpreted the sarcophagus in Basel as representing two different states: death (in the figure of Creusa) and apotheosis (as Medea speeds off on her chariot).¹¹⁷ For Fittschen, the whole of the sarcophagus stresses death, both of Creusa and of Medea's sons, while Medea appears to clarify the myth and in her role as the bringer of death.¹¹⁸

Fittschen's interpretation is persuasive and has been followed by Zanker and Ewald and Gaggadis-Robin, among others.¹¹⁹ However, there are still some aspects of these sarcophagi that demand explanation, such as the inclusion of earlier episodes in the myth such as Jason's actions in Colchis. Fittschen briefly alludes to these as representing *virtus*, and hence the *virtus* of the deceased, but does not speculate further as to how these different messages on the sarcophagi might have been combined to produce a funerary message relevant for any particular individual.¹²⁰ Most recently, a further explanation has been offered by Gessert, who seeks to link the sarcophagi with prose consolations and argues that Medea could be seen here as a negative *exemplum*.¹²¹ In order to explore some of these interpretations further I will examine the Basel sarcophagus, to see what messages it presents and how it uses myth for both lamentation and praise.

The front of the main chest of the sarcophagus depicts the story of Medea's vengeance on Jason after his announcement of his marriage to Creusa, daughter of Creon, king of Corinth. It follows closely the version presented in Euripides' *Medea*, which was a familiar text in Roman times.¹²² However, in the choice of subjects represented, and the mode in which they are depicted, there is also a clear attempt to relate this

¹¹⁴ Nock 1946: 166. ¹¹⁵ Koch 1993: 57. ¹¹⁶ Fittschen 1992.

¹¹⁷ Schmidt 1969: 16–18. ¹¹⁸ Fittschen 1992: 1056.

¹¹⁹ Gaggadis-Robin 1994: 191; Zanker and Ewald 2004: 82–4, 336–41, nos. 20–1; 2012: 76–8, 353–9, nos. 20–1.

¹²⁰ Fittschen 1992: 1056. ¹²¹ Gessert 2004.

¹²² Morgan 1998: 321, table 22 shows that copies of the *Medea* outnumber other plays of Euripides in Roman times. The sarcophagi seem to follow Euripides' account rather than, for example, Seneca's tragedy, where Medea kills her second son in Jason's presence and gives the

story directly to Roman concerns and a funerary use. Four episodes are depicted: the sons of Medea bringing gifts to Creusa as she sits in the palace; Creusa's ensuing death; Medea contemplating the murder of her sons; and Medea's escape on the chariot of the sun, with the boys' corpses.

The two episodes concerning Creusa take up two-thirds of the space and are clearly the main focus. The central scene shows the princess writhing in agony as her father looks on in despair. In Euripides' play her death is caused by the poisoned garments that she tries on, and her father only discovers her body after she has died. Here, however, she seems to be wearing the same garments as in the previous scene, and her father arrives in time to see her die. This sarcophagus also increases the number of supplementary figures in the central scene, adding a series of grieving figures behind those of Creon and Creusa. Along with the glimpse of a lavishly decorated couch behind Creusa and the chest or footstool beneath her, this adds a visual allusion to the *conclamatio* scenes of lament for the deceased that can be found on non-mythological sarcophagi and were also evoked in other mythological scenes, such as that of Alcestis, discussed above. This mythological scene of grief at a horrific death is presented in visual terms reminiscent of real-life scenes of death and distress, though unlike those scenes, Creusa here is still in the throes of her pain.

At the far left of the sarcophagus Creusa is shown again, in earlier, happier times. Here she receives gifts brought by two young boys. In the context of the myth, these are the sons of Medea, bringing the fatal gifts of a finely spun peplos and a golden diadem, both tainted with poison.¹²³ Here, however, the crown is replaced by a floral garland, of the sort worn by Roman brides.¹²⁴ The gift held by the second boy is lost, but may also have been another garland, or perhaps fruit or flowers. These changes evoke the gifts brought to a Roman bride, shown here sitting in a lavishly appointed interior, with a lyre alluding to her musical skill standing beside her. Yet the impending doom that will befall the mythological figure is also indicated here by the fact that Creusa herself and two of the other figures turn to look at the horrific events of the centre, adding a sense of doom to this otherwise tranquil scene.¹²⁵

These two episodes are closely connected. They can be read as a lament for the grievous loss of a girl on the brink of marriage. The girl here is

bodies back to him (Seneca, *Medea* 997–1025). Ovid also wrote a tragedy on the myth, now lost. Further on the literary sources see Gaggadis-Robin 1994: 37–41.

¹²³ Euripides, *Medea* 784–9. ¹²⁴ See Zanker and Ewald 2004: 337–8; 2012: 358.

¹²⁵ Gaggadis-Robin 1994: 129 suggests that the garlands allude both to marriage and to funerary customs.

Creusa, but she may also have served as an *exemplum* of the unfairness of fate, the fact that even when one is on the edge of great happiness, death can come to take it all away. The theme of the unpredictability of fate is a common one in grave epigrams, such as this one from Rome:

Fortuna spondet multa multis, praestat nemini.
Vive in dies et horas, nam proprium est nihil.

Fortune promises many things to many people, but keeps her promise to none.

Live for the day and the hour, for nothing is permanent.¹²⁶

In some cases, mythological figures can also be added as *exempla* to illustrate this unpredictability. The major heroes such as Heracles and Achilles are favourites, but this sarcophagus can be seen as working analogously, asserting that despite her apparent good fortune, Creusa's marriage was to be bitterly snatched away from her.

The right third of the sarcophagus continues the mythological narrative by representing two other episodes from Medea's story: her murder of her children and her ensuing escape. When read left to right the sarcophagus as a whole follows the narrative progression of Euripides' play, but the two scenes to the right are also divided off from the rest by the insertion here of an arch. This arch does not appear on earlier sarcophagi with Medea and forms a clear visual divider between the scenes of Creusa and Medea.¹²⁷ Schmidt suggested that the sarcophagus makes a clear division between the realms of death on earth, to the left, and that of the apotheosis of the deceased to the right.¹²⁸ However, a comparison with the use of arches on other mythological sarcophagi might suggest other possibilities. At a prosaic level, arches are often used to indicate the division between scenes that are set indoors and outdoors, as we see on the Alcestis sarcophagus in the Vatican where the arch to the far left suggests the outside world, in contrast to the internal scene of Alcestis on her death-bed (fig. 6.1). This reading works here too, since Medea is clearly outside when she leaves on her chariot, and in other representations the children are shown

¹²⁶ CLE 185; see Lattimore 1942: 154–6 for other examples.

¹²⁷ Columns regularly appear on earlier sarcophagi in the background of the gift-giving scene where they function to indicate that the scene is set indoors, but they do not divide up the action as here: Berlin, Antikensammlung, Sk 843 and Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 75248; Gaggadis-Robin 1994: nos. 2, 8.

¹²⁸ Schmidt 1969: 18.



Figure 6.14 Medea sarcophagus. Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 75248.

playing outside in a palaestra, as indicated by the presence of a herm on a sarcophagus in Mantua.¹²⁹

However, some sarcophagi can also use the arch as a visual distinguishing mark to separate out different aspects of the imagery and its message. On the Meleager sarcophagus in Ostia, discussed above, an arch divides the scene of two parents mourning at a tomb from the scene of the lament over Meleager's body (fig. 6.8). While at one level it divides an external from an internal scene, a more important function seems to be to distinguish between the everyday and the mythological, to present a paratactic structure in which human grief is placed in parallel with the mythological lament that was occasioned by Meleager's death. It seems likely to me that the arch here also acts to divide up the rhetorical message of the sarcophagus. Here, however, rather than placing the everyday in parallel with the mythological, we find instead two episodes from the same mythological narrative used to express different rhetorical messages.

Other Medea sarcophagi often compress the narratives of Medea's murder of Creusa and that of her children, with the effect that she seems almost to be wielding her drawn sword directly at Creusa, as in a sarcophagus in the Museo Nazionale Romano (fig. 6.14).¹³⁰ Here, however, Medea's agency in Creusa's death is not visually stressed and the addition of an

¹²⁹ Mantua, Palazzo Ducale; Gaggadis-Robin 1994: no. 3.

¹³⁰ Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 75248; Gaggadis-Robin 1994: no. 8. The sword can still be seen and Medea looks directly at Creusa; however, other sarcophagi where the sword is now lost also seem to have shown it in close proximity to Creusa's chest, e.g. Berlin, Antikensammlung, Sk 843. See Zanker and Ewald 2004: 338; 2012: 356, noting that this stresses Medea's responsibility for Creusa's death and presents Medea as a sort of demon of death.



Figure 6.15 Medea sarcophagus. Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 222.

extra female figure to the right of Creusa actually removes her further from it.

The presence of the arch thus presents the right end as a separate episode, although it is still visually linked to the rest by the presence of the two boys, who cross over into Creusa's realm, as well as by the glance of the nurse figure towards Medea. It shows Medea holding a drawn sword of which only the attachments to the arch can be seen, while she contemplates the murder of her children. Her head is lost, but on some other sarcophagi she was shown looking down at them, in a thoughtful pose, as on another sarcophagus in the Museo Nazionale Romano (fig. 6.15).¹³¹ The scene was a popular one on wall-paintings, such as those in the House of Jason and House of the Dioscuri, discussed in Chapter 4, where Medea was also shown in a meditative pose (pl. 5).

Here the boys seem to sense her unease. Rather than playing happily they both look up at her; one of them touches her dress while the other holds onto his brother's shoulder. In the scene to the right both boys are dead; one lies prone over Medea's shoulder while the legs of the other can be seen hanging out of the back of the chariot. These scenes have a clear narrative link with the story of Creusa to the left, but they are also presented as a separate incident, with Medea visually divided from Creusa by the arch at the same time that the figures of the boys also assert their involvement in both narratives.

The presence of the arch suggests that this episode is presented as a separate *exemplum*, similar to that of Creusa, but also marked as distinct from it. There we see the grievous loss of a promising young bride. Here

¹³¹ Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 222. Cf. also Ancona, Museo Civico, and Berlin, Antikensammlung, Sk 843 (= Gaggadis-Robin 1994: nos. 21, 20, 2).

we see instead the corpses of two young boys. Medea is their murderer, but she is also their mother, and this ambiguity is reflected visually. Medea forms an imposing figure. She is positioned frontally facing the viewer, rather than with a slight twist as on other sarcophagi, and her statuesque pose makes her seem more substantial than any other figure on the relief. The loss of her head makes it impossible to read her expression, but if she were looking down at her children as the twist of her neck seems to suggest, it may have been with a look of love (cf. [fig. 6.15](#)). Alternatively, it is possible that she was looking directly out at the viewer. In either case the static, frontal image presents her for the viewer's consideration, prompting us to engage with her dilemma.¹³²

We can read the death of Medea's sons as a second *exemplum* of tragic death; presented as a parallel instance to that of Creusa, in the manner of the lists of tragic losses that can be found in some funerary poetry. In Statius' *Silvae* 2.1, a consolation to Atedius Melior on the death of his beloved foster-son, Glaucias, Statius bemoans the unfairness of Glaucias' fate. After commemorating the early promise that Glaucias had shown, Statius turns to lament:

Haec fortuna domus. Subitas inimica levavit
 Parca manus. quo, diva, feros gravis exseris unguis?
 non te forma movet, non te lacrimabilis aetas?
 hunc nec saeva viro potuisset capere Procne
 nec fera crudeles Colchis durasset in iras,
 editus Aeolia nec si foret iste Creusa;
 torvus ab hoc Athamas insanos flecteret arcus;
 hunc, quamquam Hectoreos cineres Troiamque perosus,
 turribus e Phrygiis flesset missurus Ulixes.

Such was the fortune of the house. Suddenly hostile Fate raised her hands. To whom do you stretch out your fierce claws to harm, goddess? Does beauty not move you, nor piteous youth? This boy not even Procne however fierce at her husband could have seized, nor would the savage Colchian have hardened herself to cruel wrath, even had he been born from Aeolian Creusa; grim Athamas would have turned away his insane bow; this boy,

¹³² See Gutzwiller 2004 on Timomachus' Medea as an image embodying the agonies of her dilemma. The static image here could have evoked the same responses, though the placement of the sword is more obviously hostile here, suggesting that the decision has already been made.

even Ulysses, despite his hatred for Troy and Hector's ashes, would have wept to throw from the Phrygian towers.¹³³

Here Statius extols the good fortune of Melius' household in its possession of a youth like Glaucias, and then laments their sudden fall into grief. The unfairness of Fate is railed against through references to Glaucias' youth and beauty, which are accentuated by the series of mythological reversals that follow. So worthy was Glaucias, we are told, that even the most horrendous child-murderers of myth would have stayed their hands for him; or at least wept as they killed him. Statius alludes in turn to Procne's murder of her son Itys, in anger at her husband's rape of her sister, Philomela; Medea's slaughter of her sons and, through reference to Creusa, to her murder of her also; Athamas, who when maddened by the goddesses Hera and Nephele killed his son, Learchus; and finally Odysseus, who after the Fall of Troy threw Hector's young son Astyanax from the battlements of Troy. At one level these comparisons serve to accentuate Glaucias' promise and the unfairness of Fate, who was not swayed by this into sparing him. But through their vivid depiction of a series of vengeful child-murderers they also assert the horror of his death, and set up the mythological stories as comparisons to that horror. Statius' mythological examples all involve the deaths of children, a device to underline his argument that Glaucias' early death is particularly pitiable, but we can see the Basel sarcophagus using its mythological parallels in a comparable way. The death of the deceased, it suggests, is as unfair as that of Creusa, a bride on the brink of marriage; or of Medea's children, whose youth did not protect them.

Yet I think there is also a further resonance that some viewers might have seen in the figure of Medea here. In Statius' *Silvae*, Medea is coupled with Procne; both were women who killed their children out of anger at the actions of their husbands. Yet elsewhere in consolatory poetry and epitaphs Procne can also appear as the epitome of the grieving mother. The anonymous *Consolatio ad Liviam* compares Livia's laments for her dead son Drusus to those of Procne for Itys, and apparently sees no problem in the fact that Procne had brought about the death of her son.¹³⁴ Similarly in the epigram to Nepos discussed above, the deceased urges his grieving relative to stop his mother from lamenting him night and day 'as the mourning Attic mother does Itys'.¹³⁵ Procne and Itys do

¹³³ Statius, *Silvae* 2.1.137–45.

¹³⁴ *Consolatio ad Liviam* 105–6.

¹³⁵ *CIL* VI.21521, l. 26 (= Courtney 1995: no. 183).

not appear in funerary art, but perhaps Medea, a mother who was likewise driven to kill her children out of hatred for her husband, might also have been seen as a mother whose grief would have been particularly extreme. While this seems strange to our sensibilities, Roman funerary imagery has a number of other examples where the mythological facts of a tale are subverted or elided to make it stand as an *exemplum* for the depths of human experience. Thus we have already seen how Phaedra's grief at her incestuous love for Hippolytus could be presented as analogous to the loss felt by a mother for her son. A comparable case to that of Procne and Medea can be found in the figure of Altheia on Meleager sarcophagi. On some of these Altheia is shown as causing her son's death by plunging into the fire a brand with which his life was entwined, in order to avenge his murder of her brothers. Yet on others she is also shown as grief-stricken at the result of her actions, plunging a sword into her chest. The combination of her suicide with a scene of the return of Meleager's body on a sarcophagus in Istanbul suggests that it is the direct result of her grief at her son's death, eliding the fact that she herself had caused this.¹³⁶

The Medea sarcophagi do not show Medea in the throes of grief, yet neither do they show the actual moment of her murder of her sons. Instead, on this sarcophagus, she appears in particularly close connection to her sons, as one reaches up to touch her dress. She held a sword directly above his head, an ominous sign, which his brother seems to recognise in attempting to draw him away. Yet her static pose also offers a suspension of the danger, and, apart from the sword, the image of a woman with children at her feet might also evoke a scene of loving motherhood. To the right she is shown removing the bodies of the children from the scene. While she could be read as a demon of death, taking them off to the Underworld in a parallel way to that of Pluto on Persephone sarcophagi, it is also possible that some may have read redemption here, the promise that by removing the children she is taking them to another world. The focus that the composition puts on Medea here makes these interpretations possible. It is to her rather than to the boys that our attention is drawn. While the myth as a whole invites us to read two episodes of senseless death, those of Creusa and the children, the composition here also suggests a deeper role for Medea, one in which her role as a mother who laments the loss of her children and attempts to remove them to another world is also given space.

¹³⁶ Istanbul Archaeological Museum inv. 2100; Koch 1975: no. 81.

The lid of the Basel sarcophagus shows episodes from earlier in the myth, focussing on the deeds of Jason in Colchis. The left end is lost, but from the middle three episodes were shown: the meeting with King Aieetes on the shore, the taming of the bulls and the retrieval of the fleece. The latter two episodes are clear indications of Jason's heroic prowess and can be read as manifestations of the qualities of courage and military success. Medea is present in the fleece scene, but plays a minor role. As on the sarcophagi that make Jason's deeds their main focus, her role here seems to be as a helpmate, taming the serpent while Jason makes a heroic effort to retrieve the fleece. Jason here is not the passive hero he is portrayed as in Euripides' *Medea*, but rather an active hero, and Medea his loyal assistant, as presented in Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*. While the main body of the sarcophagus uses myth as consolation, here it is used as *exemplum*, to illustrate the quality of *virtus* through reference to Jason's heroic achievements.

What, then, does all this tell us about the rhetoric of the sarcophagus as a whole? We lack all knowledge about the inhabitant(s) of the chest, or where precisely it was found.¹³⁷ The praise of the quality of *virtus* on the lid might lead us to suggest that it commemorated a man, but the emphasis given to the death of Creusa on the main chest also suggests a lament for the loss of a young woman. Yet when we do know the inhabitants of sarcophagi we see that there need not be a direct gender relationship between the deceased and the mythological protagonist of the imagery. Instead, as we see in funerary poetry too, the experience of men can be used to comment on those of women, and vice versa. We have already seen how the rape of Persephone was used for men as well as women on cinerary altars and urns. Similarly, when declaring the depth of his grief for his father, Statius compares his sorrow to that of a mother or a young bride.¹³⁸ What matters is the extremity of grief, rather than strict alignment of gender.¹³⁹

Here, then, the sarcophagus can be read as offering a number of mythological parallels designed to express the sense of grief of the bereaved and their loss. Creusa's untimely death offers an illustration of the unfairness

¹³⁷ It is worth noting, however, that three skeletons were found inside a Medea sarcophagus from Rome (Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 75248; Gaggadis-Robin 1994: no. 8; Dresken-Weiland 2003: Kat. A37), suggesting that the myth might be seen as suitable for multiple burials.

¹³⁸ Statius, *Silvae* 5.3.64–72.

¹³⁹ Though it does seem as though intense grief is often characterised as female and Stoic restraint as male. See Seneca, *Ad Marciam* 12.6–15.4, where Seneca uses male *exempla* to urge Marcia to restraint, with the discussion of Wilcox 2006.

of fate, and the horror of loss, focalised through the reaction of her distraught father Creon. The scene of Medea and her children may also be read as an example of unfair death, but through its focus on the figure of Medea it invites us to read her as a mother too, alleviating her loss of her sons through her attempt to remove them to another sphere. The scenes on the lid move from lament and mythological prototypes for death and grief to the eulogistic assertion of *virtus*, here conveyed through the actions of Jason in Colchis, and the representation of Medea as a loyal and supportive wife. Through one myth, the sarcophagus presents a number of different messages, including praise, grief, consolation and lament, and featuring the figures of a father, a daughter, infants, a mother, a hero and his wife. Tying down this sarcophagus as one of praise or lament for a particular individual seems doomed to fail. Instead it revels in its multiplicity of associations, overlaying myth with elements of Roman reality in an effort to use myth to assert the power and extremity of death, raising the experiences of the bereaved into a completely different realm.

Here, finally, we might turn to *paideia* and 'all the values of classicism'.¹⁴⁰ As I hope to have shown, the Medea sarcophagus is more than simply decoration. Yet by seeing its message in parallel to Statius' use of myth in the *Silvae*, we can also recognise the complexity and breadth of its associations. The sarcophagus takes one myth, but uses it to convey a range of different thoughts. In this, and in its challenge to the viewer, it implies a detailed knowledge of Euripides' and Apollonius' texts, as well as an awareness of the ways myth could be used in poetry and oratory to embellish, clarify and prove. It is indeed a sophisticated piece, speaking of a commissioner who wanted to show his or her familiarity with myth and their readiness to see reality through its mirror, but who also wished to convey a profound sense of grief and loss through a medium that would elevate their experience from the personal to the universal.

¹⁴⁰ Nock 1946: 163.

7 | Epilogue: The Roman Past, the Culture of Exemplarity and a New Role for Greek Myth

Over the course of this book I have explored the different ways in which Roman viewers engaged with and responded to mythological images. While the taste for mythological subjects represented in the forms of Classical and Hellenistic art came out of an inheritance of booty and plunder associated with the Roman conquest of the Mediterranean, mythological subjects also offered purchasers the opportunity both to show off their cultural and intellectual credentials and to invite their guests into a fantasy world, removed from the duties of everyday life. From around the middle of the first century AD onwards the mythological images displayed in houses also invite a rhetorical response, creating through both positive and negative models a framework within which to consider social values and different modes of living. From the second century onwards this exemplary use of myth also infiltrates into the funerary sphere, an area where art plays a crucial role in representing the deceased to posterity and in consoling the bereaved. Yet, as we saw in [Chapter 1](#), in Roman public art Roman historical themes are generally preferred for exemplary statements, and when mythological themes do appear, they are usually used as negative rather than positive *exempla*. In this final chapter I want to address this mismatch, and to consider why Greek myth became so popular in Roman domestic and funerary imagery where Roman historical subjects are largely absent.

A number of studies have stressed the central role which the Republican past played in the construction of Roman identity as well as the extent to which exemplarity was embedded into Roman culture.¹ Through education, oratory, historiography and philosophy, Romans were taught to look for models of good ethical behaviour and to seek to excel the deeds of the past in their own actions. By acting out the values embodied in the past, the *mos maiorum*, individual Romans could come to be truly

¹ Hölkeskamp 1996; Roller 2004; Lobur 2008: 170–6; Bell and Hansen 2008; especially Bell 2008. For earlier work on *exempla* in Roman culture see Litchfield 1914 and Kornhardt 1936. Note also the work of the *Memoria Romana* research project: <http://www.utexas.edu/research/memoria>; Galinsky 2014.

Roman and ensure the continued well-being of the state.² The literary sources present a moral education based on the study of worthy predecessors as one of the key ingredients which led to Rome's greatness, and overwhelmingly draw their examples from the figures of the Republican past. Indeed, the writers Livy, Valerius Maximus and Quintilian all explicitly claim the superiority of Roman historical figures as moral *exempla* over those who might be drawn from other cultures.³ Yet as we have seen, the visual environment of the imperial age, particularly in the private and domestic spheres, was overwhelmingly filled not with the faces of Republican heroes, but with figures from Greek myth. This mismatch between the figures who reappear again and again in the literary sources as appropriate role models and those who actually appear decorating such key places for Roman self-representation as houses and tombs has attracted surprisingly little attention. In this final chapter I want to explore this discrepancy; to consider why Roman historical figures are so largely absent from Roman domestic and funerary art and how and why Greek models instead came to take their place.

First, I will outline some of the main features of the Roman culture of exemplarity and the role which visual memorials played within it. Matthew Roller has identified four main features of what he calls exemplary discourse, that is 'a discourse linking actions, audiences, values, and memory'.⁴ These are an action that embodies a key social value, such as courage (*virtus*); an audience to judge that action as good or bad; the commemoration of the action through a monument; and finally the imitation of the original action by spectators, including primary spectators of the original deed and secondary ones, spurred on by the commemoration of it.⁵ The monuments which record exemplary actions can take a variety of forms, encompassing visual monuments such as statues or aspects of topography, as well as rituals and narratives. Thus Livy's preface describes his history as a 'clear monument' on which to see laid out examples of good and bad actions from the past.⁶ Within his text he also identifies several visual monuments attesting to the deeds of those he describes, which act to preserve the memory of those deeds and urge others on to

² Ennius 5.1: *moribus antiquis res stat Romana virisque*, 'the Roman state stands by virtue of its ancient customs and its men'.

³ Livy, preface 10; Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 4.7.4; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 12.2.29–30.

⁴ Roller 2004: 4. ⁵ Roller 2004: 4–6.

⁶ Livy, preface 10. For an analysis of Livy's history in the light of the visual culture of memorialisation see Feldherr 1998 and, on his use of *exempla*, see Chaplin 2000.

emulation. A key example is the equestrian statue of the Roman virgin Cloelia that was set up on the Via Sacra to commemorate her *virtus* in escaping from the Etruscan king Porsenna.⁷

In addition to public monuments such as the honorific statues set up to past heroes, the memory of past achievements could also serve an exhortatory function within the domestic and funerary spheres.⁸ Polybius' famous description of elite public funerals draws attention to the way that the parade of ancestor masks and the eulogies of the deceased and his family helped to produce 'such a spirit into the citizens as shall lead them to encounter every kind of danger for the sake of obtaining reputation in their country'.⁹ Sallust too attests to the power of ancestral *imagines* to provoke their descendants to great deeds, recording how men like Quintus Maximus and Publius Scipio declared that it was the images of their ancestors, displayed within their family atria, which 'set their hearts aflame for the pursuit of virtue'.¹⁰ Later too, Valerius Maximus recalls the traditional practice at dinner of celebrating the outstanding deeds of one's ancestors (*egregia superiorum opera*) in music and poetry, in order to render the youth more eager to imitate them.¹¹

These texts locate funerals and the home as key places to preserve the memory of good deeds and urge others on to emulation of them. The didactic role of these *exempla* is of great importance. Roman moral education seems primarily to have worked through concrete models of good and bad behaviour to either follow or avoid, rather than through abstract principles. This is perhaps best summed up in Seneca's comment *longum iter est per praecepta, breve et efficax per exemplum*, 'the way is long if one follows precepts, but short and helpful, if one follows examples'.¹² In particular, young men are presented as learning good and bad behaviour from the models which are put in front of them – both those from history and from contemporary society.¹³

⁷ Livy 2.13.4–11 discussed by Roller 2004: 28–50. The statue has been the subject of much discussion; see Roller 2004: 45 n. 103. Hemelrijk 2005 suggests that an existing statue may have been converted into a statue to honour Cloelia by Octavian himself.

⁸ On the numerous monuments commemorating another great hero, Horatius Cocles, see Roller 2004: 11–23.

⁹ Polybius 6.52.11.

¹⁰ *Jugurthine War* 4.5–6. For a comprehensive discussion of the role of the ancestral *imagines* in Roman culture see Flower 1996.

¹¹ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 2.1.10.

¹² Seneca, *Letters* 6.5; cf. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 12.2.22. See discussion by Lobur 2008: 170–6.

¹³ Terence, *Adelphoe* 414–19; Horace, *Sermones* 1.4.105–20; Pliny, *Letters* 8.14.

Yet by the second half of the first century AD, there is also a sense that this traditional reliance on models from the Roman past may have been beginning to fade.¹⁴ Pliny the Elder looks back nostalgically to a time when the atria of past Romans were packed with wax models of the ancestors, family trees inscribed on the walls of the *tablinum* and the façade of the house decorated with spoils. These images of past triumphs are shown as girding on subsequent owners of the house: ‘This was a great incentive, when every day the very walls reproached an unwarlike owner with intruding upon another’s triumphs.’¹⁵ Pliny presents the practice as belonging to a bygone era, and laments the fact that in his day these ancestral images have been replaced instead by the portraits of strangers. This may have been only partially true. In the early second century AD Juvenal could still mock the pretensions of certain aristocratic families with their houses full of ancestral *imagines*.¹⁶ Pliny’s comments can be seen as part of a moralising nostalgia for the great days of the Republic, and his overall theme about the incursions of luxury into Roman life.¹⁷ Yet they also show that the ideal that the house should be a showcase for moral behaviour still had resonance, at least for Pliny. Recent analyses of historical *exempla* show that they were not always fixed in their meaning, but could be reused in different situations or historical arguments as part of the dynamic construction of Roman identities.¹⁸ In the previous chapters I have argued that the mythological images that decorated Roman homes can be seen as playing a similar rhetorical role in the construction and debate of social values and identities, while in tombs they function as proof of the eulogistic statements made about the dead. The question this raises, however, is why Greek myth comes to supplant Roman history as the material for rhetorical *exempla* in Roman homes and tombs.

Before we turn to this there are some aspects of the Roman culture of exemplarity and use of the past which demand further discussion. A major question is the extent to which the use of historical models from the past was a practice primarily employed by the elite, to support their own familial and group status and identity, or was available more broadly to the rest of Roman society. Much of the literature about the *imagines*, in particular, locates their use firmly within the status claims of particular patrician

¹⁴ See discussions by Gowing 2005 and Alston and Spentzou 2011.

¹⁵ Pliny, *Natural History* 35.6–7. ¹⁶ Juvenal, *Satire* 8, esp. 1–20.

¹⁷ Carey 2003: 75–101. On luxury see also Edwards 1993: 173–206 and Wallace-Hadrill 2008a: 315–55.

¹⁸ Chaplin 2000; Roller 2004; Langlands 2008: 161–2.

families, as an important weapon in Republican politics.¹⁹ The virtues manifested by the actions of past heroes also made up the *mos maiorum*, a moral code whose preservation and embodiment were presented as being the particular duty and privilege of the nobility.²⁰ Though the political rewards of being able to claim a prestigious ancestry were severely circumscribed under the Principate, Harriet Flower argues that elite families continued to value and display the *imagines* of their ancestors, perhaps because they were now largely excluded from positions of real power.²¹ There are also a few fleeting references to the display of narrative historical paintings in Roman houses of the imperial period, continuing the Republican tradition of displaying famous victories achieved by oneself or one's family.²²

While the role of the past as a source of identity for some particular elite families seems to have continued into the imperial period, there is also evidence that the past could be promulgated more widely, as a source of moral *exempla* to influence the whole of Roman society. This is already the case in Polybius' account of the Roman public funeral, which is explicitly introduced as one of the means by which Rome encouraged a love of glory and patriotic selflessness on the part of her citizens.²³ However, it is most clearly stated in works from the early imperial period, as in Livy's *History*, whose preface identifies the whole work as a source of moral *exempla*.²⁴ It can also be seen in the numerous collections of *exempla* that seem to have been formed around this time. Both Atticus and Varro are said to have composed collections of portraits of great men, with accompanying poems summarising their achievements, while a little later Valerius Maximus' compilation of *Memorable Doings and Sayings* explicitly addresses itself to the reader in search of proofs (*documenta*) so that they might be 'spared the toil of a long search'.²⁵

¹⁹ Flower 1996; see also Holliday 2002: esp. 1–21 on historical commemoration more generally.

²⁰ Hölkeskamp 1996.

²¹ Flower 1996: 223–69; at 263–4 she suggests that *imagines* continued to be displayed in non-imperial funerals until the Severan period. See Hopkins 1983: 120–200, esp. 171–5 on the status of old aristocratic families in the imperial period.

²² Flower 1996: 212; e.g. SHA, *Gordian* 3.6–8 on a painting of the wild beast hunt sponsored by Gordian I.

²³ Polybius 6.54.

²⁴ Livy, preface 10. See Chaplin 2000 for a nuanced account, not least of the ways Livy allows the meanings of his *exempla* to be contested.

²⁵ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 1, preface. For readings of Valerius Maximus' work see Bloomer 1992; Skidmore 1996; Lobur 2008: 170–207; and Langlands 2008 and 2011. Langlands' forthcoming book on *exempla* will make an important contribution to this area of research.

These models from the Roman past were being promulgated to the wider Roman readership, including those outside elite families, as examples of key Roman virtues. This sudden trend for classifying and communicating time-honoured Roman values and the key exemplars of them can be seen as a response to the demands of the time. Numerous studies have showed how, after the social fractures caused by the wars of the late Republic, Roman society during the age of Augustus needed to mend itself, and find its own identity afresh. A large part of Augustus' achievement was to present himself as the heir to the best of Rome's past, restoring her religious and moral values while clearly setting himself at the centre of her future promise and stability.²⁶

This can be most clearly seen in the programme of the new Forum of Augustus, with its roll-call of Roman heroes in the two porticoes which flanked the temple.²⁷ Here Augustus appropriated the entire catalogue of *summi viri* into a version of his prestigious past. On one side were the members of his own adopted family, the Julii, headed by a figure of Aeneas in the northwestern exedra, while opposite were the other great heroes of the Roman past, headed by Romulus, in the southeastern exedra. The dress of the statues indicated their achievements, some certainly wearing triumphal regalia while others may have worn the toga or cuirass.²⁸ Each was accompanied by a brief identifying caption (*titulus*), as well as an *elogium*, indicating their major achievements. The sources suggest that Augustus was personally involved in selecting these models, even going so far as to contribute to the writing of the *elogia*.²⁹ While Livy's history might seem to democratise the moral heroes of the past, making them available to all as moral *exempla*, Augustus' appropriation simultaneously monopolised them, harnessing them to his new imperial mission.

Augustus' gallery of heroes is explicitly represented by Suetonius as having an exemplary function. He quotes an imperial edict which declared that Augustus had set up these images to serve as an *exemplum* for himself

²⁶ On Augustus and tradition see Volkmann 1975; Eder 1990 and 2005. For comprehensive treatments of the role played by art and literature in this endeavour see especially Zanker 1988 and Galinsky 1996. See also Wallace-Hadrill 2008a: 213–58 on the way authority was directed away from elite families towards antiquarians sponsored by Augustus.

²⁷ The primary accounts are Degraffi 1937: 1–36 and Zanker 1968. See also J. C. Anderson 1984: 65–100; Zanker 1988: 193–215; Spannagel 1999; and Geiger 2008. For contextual accounts linking this to *exempla* and the use of ancestral images see Flower 1996: 224–36; Chaplin 2000: 168–96; and, on the differences between Augustus' programme and Livy, Luce 1990. Further discussion above in pp. 58–64.

²⁸ Dio 55.10.3; Zanker 1988: 211–12.

²⁹ Pliny, *Natural History* 22.6.13; Suetonius, *Augustus* 31.5.

and for future leaders of the standard by which they would be judged by the people.³⁰ While the Forum is here a model for Augustus himself, it also presents its moral messages to the populace as a whole. Augustus' love for moral *exempla* is attested elsewhere by Suetonius, who says that he was accustomed to scan literature for various precepts and *exempla* to send to others, as well as in the *Res Gestae* with its proud statement that he had revived many *exempla* of the past and handed down new ones to posterity.³¹

In Augustus' Forum, as well as in Livy's *History* and the collecting of famous *exempla* in compendia, we can see the use of the past to redefine Roman identity and values at a collective level. The crucial role played by Roman history in creating a communal sense of identity is summed up thus by Lobur:

The familiar language of republican history . . . contained the unimpeachable social and cultural truths whereby Romans learned how to become Romans, experienced their social and political world, and understood themselves and their roles.³²

While these values are clearly represented as being grounded in the past, authorised by ancestral deeds and custom, they are also removed from the patrician families which had so jealously guarded them and made accessible to all. Bloomer has suggested that Valerius Maximus' compendium served as a handbook allowing new upwardly mobile citizens to lay claim to a Roman tradition created by the great Republican families.³³ While he puts a greater stress on its role as a collection of moral teachings, Skidmore equally asserts the role this work had in diffusing aristocratic traditions to a wider readership; as he puts it, 'examples from literature had become the ancestral images of the educated classes'.³⁴

Given all this, we might have expected members of Roman society in the imperial age to embrace these Roman models in their domestic and funerary art, identifying themselves with a newly defined traditional set of Roman values, embodied in the actions of the past, but now made accessible to all. At first, there is some evidence that this was indeed the case. Peter Holliday has offered a convincing reading of the paintings from the so-called Tomb of the Statilii at Rome as asserting the deceased's membership in a common culture of *Romanitas*.³⁵ The painted programme shows scenes from the ancient history of Rome, including Mars and Rhea Silvia, the twins Romulus and Remus and two battles of the Trojans and

³⁰ Suetonius, *Augustus* 31.5. ³¹ Suetonius, *Augustus* 89.2; *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 8.5.

³² Lobur 2008: 206–7. ³³ Bloomer 1992: 255–9.

³⁴ Skidmore 1996: 27. ³⁵ Holliday 2005.

Latins against the Rutuli, all key moments in the foundation history of Rome. Rather than depicting a more contemporary history, celebrating the deeds of his own family, as in the mid-Republican tomb of Q. Fabius on the Esquiline, Holliday suggests that the owner of this tomb, whose decoration he dates to c. 43–34 BC, instead picked up on the new focus on communal Roman values expressed through events from the past to assert his status and allegiance to the new order.³⁶

A little later, a wall-painting from Pompeii also provides evidence of a comparable attempt to link oneself through art to the history of the Roman state. A modest house, Pompeii V, 4.13, is predominantly decorated in a simple manner, with the exception of a triclinium off the garden peristyle which was decorated in a late Third-Style scheme.³⁷ On the end wall a painting enclosed within an *aedicula* shows a landscape scene with events relating to the origins of Rome (fig. 7.1).³⁸ The approach of Mars towards the sleeping Rhea Silvia is shown in the upper section, while Mercury and a female figure appear in the lower section approaching the twins Romulus and Remus as they suckle from the she-wolf. Both are key episodes from Rome's foundation myth, especially as it had been codified under Augustus. But they are expressed within the visual vocabulary of a mythological landscape painting, the majority of which show episodes from Greek myth, such as Perseus and Andromeda, or Daedalus and Icarus.³⁹ Here the transportative power of an imaginary landscape is used to carry its viewers into the Roman past. The owner has been tentatively identified as one M. Fabius Secundus, who also appears in the archive of L. Caecilius Jucundus.⁴⁰ For this patron it seemed more appropriate that he and his guests should be transported not into the timeless world of Greek myth, but back to the very origins of Rome.

These two examples suggest that some patrons did indeed buy into the elevation of Roman history as a source of communal identity, but they remain isolated cases. When subsequent individuals wished to assert their Roman identity, particularly in funerary art, they turned primarily towards the public world and duties of the citizen, representing themselves in formal attire (toga or stola), or engaged in the duties of a civic magistrate. This is especially true of freedmen classes, whose desire to show their

³⁶ Holliday 2005: 113–24. At 108–9 he notes the parallels with the frieze on the Basilica Aemilia in the Forum which may also date from this period and uses references to legendary history to assert Augustan moral values, as argued by Albertson 1990 and Kampen 1991; see above, pp. 65–6.

³⁷ PPM 3: 1062–8; von Blanckenhagen 1949–50; Albertson 1987; Dardenay 2010: 189–92.

³⁸ Naples, Museo Nazionale, no inv. number.

³⁹ Dawson 1944; Bergmann 1999. ⁴⁰ Von Blanckenhagen 1949–50.



Figure 7.1 Wall-painting showing the origins of Rome from Pompeii V, 4.13. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, no inv. number.

participation in the citizen body seems particularly strong.⁴¹ The deeds and people of the past may still have held a resonance for certain elite families, but outside these privileged groups, references to a commonly held historical past seem to be few.⁴² Instead, if one wanted to assert more general messages or values by seeking analogies from another time, it was

⁴¹ Zanker 1975; L. H. Petersen 2006.

⁴² For a discussion of the portraits from the so-called Tomb of the Licinii, see Kragelund, Moltesen and Østergaard 2003.

the world of Greek myth rather than Roman history which seems to have filled the need.

The previous chapters have shown how in the house and the tomb, myth could provide the means to assert or debate moral values, to look for analogies from the past and to elevate the claims to status of an individual – all of these being functions which the literary sources represent as the particular preserve of Roman history. Indeed, this is not just the case in texts from the early imperial period, such as Valerius Maximus with his bold dismissal of Theseus and Peirithoos as a model of friendship, in favour of the Roman example of Volumnius' willingness to die following the death of his friend Lucullus.⁴³ So Quintilian, writing in the late first century AD, asserts the superiority of Roman history in the provision of *exempla*:

Surely other peoples will not teach us fortitude, justice, good faith, self-control, frugality and contempt of pain and death better than the Fabricii, Curii, Reguli, Decii, Mucii, and other countless men? For as much as the Greeks prevail in precepts, the Roman prevail in something greater: *exempla*.⁴⁴

How can we explain this mismatch between the literary picture of a communal Roman identity based on moral values preserved in the *exempla* of the past, and the visual picture of the widespread use of myth to convey messages of status, ideals and virtues? For me this is the central question which the abundance of myth in domestic and funerary art raises. It is through exploring this discrepancy that we can identify what it was that myth offered and history did not, and how the uses of myth illuminate changing Roman social, political and moral values. Indeed, an exploration of the art helps to modify the picture gained from the literature, much of which was either written in the Augustan period and represents that period's struggle to find a common Roman identity, or was written later but is infused with elite Roman Republican sentiment. Art gives an insight into the changing values and needs of a broader range of society, which myth could help to address.⁴⁵

⁴³ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 4.7.4.

⁴⁴ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 12.2.30.

⁴⁵ Bell and Hanson 2008 includes a number of papers that challenge the elite literary picture (D'Ambra 2008; Hales 2008) or trace discontent with traditional role models (Spentzou 2008; Alston 2008), but does not discuss this issue in detail; see brief comments in Bell 2008: 12–19. Mayer 2012 offers an answer based on class, discussed below and in the Introduction.

The Decline of the Historical Model

The first thing to note is that the very existence of the Principate changed the meanings and uses of Republican history, since this could always be seen as either providing the model for the emperor or, by opponents, as representing an ideal time of freedom, set in opposition to the rule by one man.⁴⁶ From the time of Augustus, historical models and *exempla* are complemented and often supplanted by the exemplary figure of the emperor and his wider family. While Augustus represented himself as the embodiment of the virtues of the past, to be judged against the heroes of the Republic, the emperor as the prime *exemplum* could also overshadow those predecessors, making them redundant.⁴⁷ Velleius Paterculus states the emperor's role as primary *exemplum* particularly clearly when he proclaims:

For the best *princeps* teaches his citizens to act rightly by his own actions, and while he is greatest in power, he is greater still as an example.⁴⁸

As the century progressed historical *exempla* continued to be adduced as important models of behaviour, but they were also often linked with the examples of the imperial family.⁴⁹ So a moral philosopher like Seneca can advocate that his readers look at the Stoic examples of great men of the past, but he is also careful to include members of the imperial household as more recent examples of worthy behaviour, as can be seen for example in his consolatory works.⁵⁰ By the time of Pliny's *Panegyricus*, the great Roman names of the past are cited primarily to show the extent to which Trajan is said to exceed them.⁵¹ In art too, the emperor forms a key model, setting out a typology for virtues which could be echoed and appropriated in private monuments, as for example in the *Vita Romana* sarcophagi.⁵²

At the same time as the emperor embodied and thus supplanted the role models from history, in other contexts models from the past could be seen as asserting counter-values, threatening the stability of the empire

⁴⁶ Gowing 2005: esp. 28–66 on Velleius and Valerius Maximus.

⁴⁷ See Kraus 2005. ⁴⁸ Velleius Paterculus 2.126.4.

⁴⁹ Valerius Maximus' work makes few references to the imperial family, but note Lobur 2008: 198–207 for the suggestion that his stress on Republican values which tied in with the actions or values of Tiberius may have been an implicit compliment to the emperor.

⁵⁰ E.g. *Ad Marciam* 3–5 on the model set by Livia.

⁵¹ Pliny, *Panegyricus* 13.4–5, 88.6; see Gowing 2005: 120–5.

⁵² For discussion see Hölscher 1980: 288–90 and 2008: 49–52.

through their assertion of the Republican ideas of freedom. Thus in Tacitus' *Annals*, the historian Cremutius Cordus meets his downfall under Tiberius because of his literary praise of the assassins of Julius Caesar, Brutus and Cassius, while the much-vaunted independent republicanism of other figures, such as Thrasea Paetus, can be construed as opposition to the emperor.⁵³ While the use of the past as a means to define senatorial identity in opposition to the emperor is recognised by Tacitus, and also finds expression in the letters of Pliny the Younger, Alston and Spentzou have recently suggested that by this period in the early second century AD there was a growing sense that these old Republican role models were no longer appropriate for the new imperial world.⁵⁴ They argue that while some, like Pliny the Younger, still looked to Republican models for their sense of senatorial elite identity, Tacitus, for one, recognised that those models of behaviour could no longer work, and used his historical works to suggest alternative models.⁵⁵

Indeed, Alston and Spentzou argue convincingly for a profound disengagement with the model of Roman identity which had been formed in the Augustan period; 'a model firmly rooted in the past, but also one which elevated loyalty to the state above other concerns and proclaimed the historical destiny of Rome'.⁵⁶ Thus while Livy and Vergil had presented a narrative in which Rome's greatness could be seen through the heroes of her past and now reached its apogee in the figure of Augustus, they see in the texts produced from the Neronian to Trajan period a profound unease and dissatisfaction with the inherited model:

Instead of grand political posturing, manifestos for change, the rhetorical brilliance of political battle, we find an unease, a striving for meaning, and a discomfort with inherited meanings which drove the writers to produce texts dealing with disruptions to the political and cultural system in which they lived.⁵⁷

The models and deeds of the past had not gone away, they were still on display in great houses, called upon in rhetorical speeches and commemorated in both art and verse by even so loyal a servant of the imperial house as the equestrian official to Domitian, Titinius Capito. This man is praised by Pliny the Younger for setting up a public statue to Lucius Silanus, who

⁵³ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.34–5; 16.21–35. See Alston 2008: 152–3 on Tacitus' representation of Cordus.

⁵⁴ Alston and Spentzou 2011. See also Gowing 2005, suggesting that from the time of Nero and certainly in the Flavian period, the Republic as a political idea had lost its resonance.

⁵⁵ Alston and Spentzou 2011: 141–92; also Alston 2008. For a different reading of Tacitus see Gowing 2005: 131.

⁵⁶ Alston and Spentzou 2011: 3 ⁵⁷ Alston and Spentzou 2011: 5.

had been executed by Nero, as well as revering the memory of other great men of the past through writing poems and displaying statues of Brutus, Cassius and Cato in his home.⁵⁸

Yet the relevance of these Republican models of actions and behaviour seems to have had an increasingly limited scope. They may still have been of importance for the self-identity of a few elite families, but even for these, there is a sense that old Republican values cannot truly be lived out in an imperial age, even if some might have struggled to do so. Thus Tacitus presents Galba's old-fashioned strictness and severity as fatally out of step with the times, as manifested in his failure to win over the army by offering them a donative on the adoption of Piso.⁵⁹ There is also a sense of a redrawing of the moral values which one can or should assert under the Principate. Tacitus contrasts Agricola's ability to make real achievements under the reign of Domitian with the reckless martyrdom sought by others, a pointed reference to the sort of Republican *libertas* that brought destruction on many under Domitian, as it had also led to the death of Thræsea Paetus under Nero:

Let them know, whose practice is to admire subversion, that even under an evil emperor it is possible for there to be great men, and modesty and deference, if allied to hard work and vitality, excels in praise that fame, which most seek out through sudden, planned death which is of no use to the state.⁶⁰

He also identifies in the *Histories* the moral qualities that were manifested in even these most dissolute times:

Yet this age was not so barren of virtues that it did not produce good *exempla*. Mothers accompanying their fleeing children, wives following their husbands into exile, daring relatives, loyal sons-in-law, the faith of slaves strong even against torture, famous men who endured the final necessities with fortitude, and met a death equal to the praised deaths of antiquity.⁶¹

While some of these qualities – *fides*, *fortitudo*, *constantia* – are those praised in ancient times too, the scope in which they are exercised is very

⁵⁸ Pliny, *Letters* 1.17; 8.12; discussed by Alston and Spentzou 2011: 147–8. On Silanus see Tacitus, *Annals* 4.34.

⁵⁹ Tacitus, *Histories* 1.18: *nocuit antiquus rigor et nimis severitas, cui pares non sumus*, 'his ancient strictness and excessive severity ruined him, for we are no longer equal to them'. See Alston and Spentzou 2011: 157–9.

⁶⁰ Tacitus, *Agricola* 42, trans. Alston and Spentzou 2011: 166–7 with discussion 164–7, esp. 167 n. 26, which compares Tacitus, *Annals* 14.11 on Thræsea whose actions 'brought danger on himself, but did not forward the start of liberty for others'.

⁶¹ *Histories* 1.3.

different. The absolute virtues may be the same, but their expression and use vary greatly; now the family, rather than the state, is the chief arena and beneficiary.

What this analysis of the uses of the past and the role of *exempla* in Roman culture shows is that Roman identity, at individual, group and communal levels, had long been based on a common moral code exemplified through the actions of the heroes of the past. This found a particular codification in the reign of Augustus when we can see a desire to present a communal past full of moral values that could form a common bond for the whole Roman people. Yet as the Principate developed these Republican values came to lose some of their meaning and vibrancy; while they were still important for the self-identity of ancient families among the elite, or those who wished to identify with them, for others they came to look increasingly out of place with current political realities. There is also a sense that while many of the virtues that were esteemed remained the same, the scope within which they were manifested had now changed, from the state to the family. It is against this background of social and political change, I suggest, that we need to look at the rise in popularity of Greek myth. While references to Roman history are largely lacking in the visual spheres in which individuals chose to present their values, hopes and identities, Greek myth stepped in to fill the gap.

The Attractions of Greek Myth

Why was this? What made Greek myth so attractive and able to fulfil individual needs that, for example, by the end of the second century AD, it was the dominant choice for the decoration of Roman sarcophagi? I have argued here that the introduction of Greek mythological imagery to Rome began with plunder, and played a particular role in creating the luxurious, fantasy atmosphere consistent with the world of *otium* in the Roman villa. Yet over time these myths spread into the more public areas of the house, as well as into funerary commemoration, areas where a link with the owner's own self-portrayal and values seems more likely. Here I want to look at this historical context in a little more detail, to explore what it was that Greek myth offered which Roman history, so dominant earlier, especially in literature and oratory, could not.

First, it is necessary to define in more detail the audience with which we are dealing. While the literary evidence is overwhelmingly elite in nature,

the visual material covers a much broader sector of society, although we are still dealing with the wealthier members of society rather than those at its very bottom.⁶² The lack of references to Roman history in the extant visual record from houses and tombs, and the overwhelming abundance instead of Greek mythological imagery, might be seen as due in part to the accidents of preservation and the parts of society that these remains largely reflect. While we have plentiful evidence from the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, it is precisely the Roman townhouses of the imperial aristocracy that are mostly missing from the archaeological record. The choice of myth might then represent the tastes of those below the highest echelons of society, who could not lay claim to a part in the prestigious past of Rome, and whose backgrounds and social identity might in any case have led them to seek expressions of values and identity elsewhere.⁶³

Indeed, recently Emanuel Mayer has argued for a profound distinction between the use of myth by middle-class buyers and the senatorial aristocracy. When discussing mythological sarcophagi, Mayer rightly notes that only a few can be certainly attributed to senatorial families, whereas a much greater number are known to have been commissioned by non-elite buyers, especially freedmen.⁶⁴ He suggests that for the senatorial aristocracy mythological themes would have been felt inappropriate, since literary interpretations of myths opened up potentially unwanted messages about the dead, and that instead they chose to commission *Vita Romana* sarcophagi which celebrated their status and achievements.⁶⁵ In response to this, I would argue instead for a more nuanced picture. In particular, I see Mayer's divisions between 'elite' and 'middle class' as too stark, especially in the way that the 'elite' is here reduced solely to the senatorial order.⁶⁶

Certainly some members of the senatorial aristocracy did choose to commemorate themselves through allusion to their political rank and activities, particularly in the group of *Vita Romana* sarcophagi, which arise around AD 170 and celebrated through stock scenes of clemency, sacrifice and marriage the status and virtues of the deceased. Yet the

⁶² Recent scholarship has sought to turn away from a narrow focus on the elite by looking at this broader sector of the art-buying public, including especially freedmen: Clarke 2003; L. H. Petersen 2006; also Mayer 2012.

⁶³ See Lorenz 2008: 250–8, 445–52 for some thoughts on how mythological paintings at Pompeii related to the wider communal symbolism of myth.

⁶⁴ Mayer 2012: 141–2 with nn. 143–4; for analysis of the epigraphic evidence see Wrede 2001; Dresken-Weiland 2003: 41–7; and Borg 2013: 206–9 on third-century sarcophagi.

⁶⁵ Mayer 2012: 142. ⁶⁶ See Mouritsen 2012 and Wallace-Hadrill 2013.

number of these sarcophagi surviving is tiny when compared to the rest of the material from the same period, which is overwhelmingly dominated by mythological themes.⁶⁷ It is not unreasonable to suggest that some of these uninscribed mythological sarcophagi also served to bury members of senatorial families, and were placed within larger tombs whose ownership was indicated elsewhere.⁶⁸ The series of lavish, high-quality mythological sarcophagi, including scenes of the triumph of Dionysus and the rape of the Leucippidae, which were found in a tomb chamber along the Via Salaria in Rome can be persuasively linked to a wealthy and high-status family, though the evidence precludes a firm association with the heirs of the Licinii Crassi who had owned this area in earlier decades.⁶⁹ Conversely, senatorial iconography could also be adopted by those who appear not to have held official senatorial positions, as is suggested by a sarcophagus in the Vatican which adopts the iconography of military clemency but without the status-specific *sella castrensis*.⁷⁰

A number of recent studies have shown the blurring between mythological and real-life scenes on sarcophagi, suggesting that both myth and *realia* could be used to assert important values.⁷¹ While sometimes myth might have allowed someone of inferior rank to make ambitious claims about the status to which they aspired, myth should not always be seen as the lesser partner in this process.⁷² Indeed, on the Berlin sarcophagus discussed in the [last chapter](#) we saw how myth could be used to assert the deceased's *virtus*, while also allowing for wider messages about the tragedy of his death. Clearly, here, myth was not seen as an inappropriate way of talking about the dead.

Senatorial families had a wide range of media in which to represent themselves and their values. They continued to display the faces of their

⁶⁷ See the pie charts compiled by Ewald 2003: figs. 1b–c. Reinsberg 2006 lists ten examples of the frieze-type of this sarcophagi.

⁶⁸ See Ewald 2003: 563–5 on the problems of identifying senatorial sarcophagi either through scanty inscriptional evidence or through obviously senatorial iconography.

⁶⁹ See Kragelund, Moltesen and Østergaard 2003: 38, 55–65, 102–4 for full discussion of the evidence. Kragelund tends towards seeing continuity in ownership, whereas Østergaard is more sceptical. Amedick 2010: 37–9 accepts the identification and suggests that the Dionysiac procession is here used to compare the deceased to a *triumphator*, a position reserved in historical images for the emperor.

⁷⁰ Amedick 2010: 34; Reinsberg 2006: 90–1, 236–7, no. 152. See also the suggestion that the so-called Balbinus sarcophagus may actually have been commissioned for a man of non-senatorial rank since it does not show senatorial shoes: Wrede 2001: 51–3; Reinsberg 2006: 109; Borg 2013: 183–4.

⁷¹ See especially Stilp 2013; Koortbojian 2013.

⁷² For this idea of myth as a sign of aspiration to higher status, see Amedick 2010.

ancestors in houses and tombs and could also model themselves on the emperor, adopting imperial iconographies such as those of the clement general or pious magistrate, as in the *Vita Romana* sarcophagi.⁷³ Yet throughout the period in which mythological sarcophagi were produced, they could also turn to myth, as shown by the early garland sarcophagus of C. Bellicus Natalis Tebianus or the Severan Ariadne sarcophagus, which commemorates Maconiana Severiana (fig. 6.12).⁷⁴ When we turn to the domestic sphere, myth is not only present in the ‘middle-class’ houses of Campania, though Pompeii certainly dominates our evidence.⁷⁵ From Rome we find mythological paintings in the Villa Negroni house as well as in suburban villas such as that of Munatia Procula. In the earliest phases it may have been precisely the choice of mythological paintings to decorate elite homes, such as the Palatine House of Livia, or the Villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscotrecase, which helped to encourage a taste for it elsewhere.

We also need to refine our definition of the Roman ‘elite’. The Principate had ushered in a profound societal change in which imperial freedmen could come to have just as much power and wealth as the traditional aristocracy. While members of the aristocracy might look down on such men in their letters and histories, they must also have mingled with them on a day-to-day basis.⁷⁶ Further down the social scale, members of local aristocracies mingled with freedmen and their descendants both socially and in business. Lauren Hackworth Petersen’s analysis of ‘freedman art’ cautions us on the difficulties of differentiating art commissioned by freedmen from those who were freeborn, stressing instead the ways in which the art that was commissioned by freedmen often shows a common cultural language with that of other groups of society.⁷⁷ Whereas earlier funerary reliefs for freedmen present an outward-facing public persona to the world, the mythological scenes chosen on sarcophagi commissioned by freedmen show a change of emphasis towards more personal, emotional values. Rather than seeing this as purely due to the social status of the commissioners, we should instead consider how they might here too be

⁷³ Flower 1996: 212; Reinsberg 1995, 2006; Muth 2004.

⁷⁴ Pisa: Herdejürgen 1996: no. 6; J. Paul Getty Museum inv. 83.AA.275; Matz 1968a: no. 214; Walker 1990, discussed above, p. 307.

⁷⁵ On Mayer’s analysis of these see also L. H. Petersen 2013.

⁷⁶ The very texts that lament senatorial flattery of imperial freedmen also provide us with evidence of these interactions; Pliny, *Letters* 8.6; Epictetus, *Discourses* 4.1.148. Note also Statius, *Silvae* 3.3, a consolation to Claudius Etruscus on the death of his father, an imperial freedman who became a knight and married the sister of a consul. On this man’s career see Weaver 1965.

⁷⁷ L. H. Petersen 2006: esp. 1–13 and 123–83 on the domestic sphere.

tapping into the changing social values of the world around them, as well as the contexts in which these images were viewed.⁷⁸

The social makeup of the aristocracy itself had also changed. While Pliny the Younger and Tacitus sometimes paint a picture of a backwards-looking senate, concerned with the traditions of its leading members, the composition of the senate had radically changed throughout the course of the first century AD, with one estimate suggesting that less than 2 per cent of the Flavian senate could have traced their lineage back to patrician families of the Republican period.⁷⁹ In addition to long-standing Italian families, the senate now included figures from Spain, Gaul and the Greek East, and continued to expand its breadth throughout the second century AD. Many of the new senators had their own regional traditions and cultures which they brought with them, not least an adherence to Greek culture. Thus, as for Roman youths, a Greek education seems to have been part of the requirements of the elite in Roman Gaul and formed an even more integral part of the self-identity of senators from the eastern provinces.⁸⁰ These senators had houses and villas at Rome and some certainly seem to have been buried there.⁸¹ While they could have advertised their absorption into the Roman aristocracy by adopting traditionally Roman means of display, the dominance of Greek myth suggests instead a self-confidence in their traditions, as well as the fact that by now, Greek culture had become the common cultural language of the empire.⁸²

The wealthy art-commissioning classes of Roman Italy also included many outside the senate, including rich freedmen and foreigners who had chosen to move to Rome for various reasons, including intellectuals, doctors, philosophers and the like.⁸³ Modern scholars have noted the possibilities for social mobility at Rome, with Dench drawing a comparison between Rome and modern America in her discussion of a shared

⁷⁸ On earlier freedmen reliefs see Zanker 1975. For a comparison of the messages portrayed outside and within a tomb see D'Ambra 1988; also Wallace-Hadrill 2008b.

⁷⁹ Hammond 1957: 75. On turnover within the senate see Hopkins 1983: 120–200.

⁸⁰ On Greek culture in Gaul, and especially the influence of the Greek colony of Massilia (Marseilles), see Strabo, *Geography* 4.1.5; Tacitus, *Agricola* 4.2; Gros 1992. For a recent discussion of the complex self-identity of Herodes Atticus, an Athenian sophist and Roman consul, see M. Gleason 2010.

⁸¹ On the loyalty of these new senators to both Rome and their home towns, see Eck 1997.

⁸² For some comments on how this is manifested in the festival culture of the empire see Newby 2005: 33–7, 76–87.

⁸³ Noy 2000. On the cosmopolitan nature of Rome see Edwards and Woolf 2003.

aspirational ‘Roman dream’.⁸⁴ All of these individuals could have been involved in commissioning artistic works to commemorate themselves or decorate their houses and villas. While Mayer rejects the idea of a trickle-down from elite fashions to the lower orders, Wallace-Hadrill’s analysis of the spread of luxury throughout the various layers of Roman society remains a more convincing model, corroborated by both visual and literary evidence.⁸⁵ Rather than seeing the rise of myth as due to social class, then, I suggest that it instead relates to the sense of a changing focus, from the public and political to the private and familial, as the arena within which important social values and identities could be expressed.

The Erotics of Conjuality

In order to explore this shift in values a little more, I will look at the dominance of myths associated with love between couples. Erotic myths dominate the visual repertoire to a striking extent. Lorenz notes that 70 per cent of the mythological scenes on Pompeian wall-paintings focus on lovers, with a particular emphasis on erotic couples in Fourth-Style paintings.⁸⁶ On sarcophagi too, the erotic myths of Dionysus and Ariadne and Endymion and Selene provide a major theme, while a similar focus on the couple can be seen in the later development of sarcophagi focussing on Mars and Rhea Silvia and Achilles and Penthesilea.⁸⁷ While an interest in erotic scenes in the house can, in part, be seen as the result of a desire to create a world of luxurious *otium*, the appearance of pairs of lovers in the more public areas of the house, such as the atrium and tablinum, and in funerary art, does suggest a desire to create a link between the scenes portrayed and the self-representation of the owner or deceased. Indeed, in a number of these scenes, particular elements help to forge a close link with the real people who dwelt there. Thus paintings can add Roman-style hairstyles or elements of furniture and background to create a parallel between the lovers portrayed and the owners of the house, while some erotic sarcophagi add portrait features to the heads of the

⁸⁴ Dench 2005: 367.

⁸⁵ Wallace-Hadrill 2008a: 356–440; Mayer 2012: 23–4, 169–70. See also Zanker 1979a.

⁸⁶ Lorenz 2008: 32, 41. See also Hodske 2007: 33–68 and CD-Rom, table 3.

⁸⁷ Compare also the portraits of men and women in the guise of Ares and Aphrodite: D’Ambra 1996; Kousser 2007.

mythological couples, directly linking them to the people or person buried within.⁸⁸

This desire to present mythological couples as models for Roman patrons seems to first arise in the middle of the first century AD, and gains particular momentum in the second century through to the end of the Severan period, when the use of portrait faces to link erotic couples to the deceased reaches its height. Erotic subjects certainly appear in the house before then, but the emphasis in earlier paintings of lovers tends to be on creating an imaginary fantasy world drawing the viewer in, rather than on inserting elements linking the scene to Roman realities. If we focus on paintings in the most public, representational spaces of the house, such as the atrium and tablinum, we find that myths are relatively rare. Where they do appear, however, those of the Third Style are primarily dominated by epic themes, as in the House of the Gilded Cupids, whereas in the Fourth-Style ensembles found in the House of the Tragic Poet and the House of Meleager, scenes of couples representing different models of relationship or lifestyle instead dominate. There seems to be a new focus on close erotic bonds as a model for the relationship between husband and wife, as can be seen in the popularity of scenes of Mars and Venus in Pompeian houses, and in the love scenes that appear on sarcophagi.

These scenes stress the erotic attachment between man and wife, rather than focussing on their public image, as in earlier family funerary portraits. The new focus on conjugal relationships in the literature of the Roman Empire has been noted by many, identifying it particularly as a response to the changed social and political conditions of the Principate.⁸⁹ Spentzou and Alston have drawn attention to the ways that these relationships could be represented in terms previously deemed appropriate for love elegy, in which the poet's *domina* was his mistress rather than his wife.⁹⁰ From the late first century AD, we start to find the conventional imagery of love elegy being applied to marital relationships. It is this new focus on the erotics of marriage and the use of imagery drawn from the world of love elegy, which made copious use of mythological parallels, that might

⁸⁸ Lorenz 2008: 74–5, 155–8. On the sarcophagi see Newby 2011: 201–14.

⁸⁹ Veyne 1978: esp. 37–9; Foucault 1986: 69–95, 145–85; Brown 1989. Less theoretical but also useful is Dixon 1991. Foucault's *History of Sexuality* has provoked intense debate; for some critiques see Goldhill 1995 and Larmour, Miller and Platter 1988. For an analysis of myth's role in the cultivation of the self and emotions, drawing in theories from psychology, see Ewald 2012: 46–9.

⁹⁰ See Alston and Spentzou 2011: 107–40.

help to explain the turn towards mythological imagery to express marital relationships also in the visual sphere.⁹¹

In *Silvae* 1.2, Statius addresses an *epithalamion* to his patron Stella on the occasion of his marriage to Violentilla.⁹² Arruntius Stella was a man in the public eye; one of the *quindecimviri* in charge of the Sibylline books, he was hoping for a senatorial career and indeed was later made consul.⁹³ His marriage is depicted as a public event, attended by representatives of all classes of society, and this poem in celebration of it would presumably too have reached a large audience.⁹⁴ The imagery Statius uses to describe Stella's courtship is drawn directly from the language of elegy. No longer will he have to endure the trials of elegiac courtship – the janitor guarding the door, the endless sighs – instead, Venus persuades Violentilla to yield to his suit, and marriage is the result.⁹⁵ Statius pictures Violentilla recalling Stella's gifts, prayers and tearful vigils at her door as well as his clamours to her in the name of Asteris, and her new resolve to 'bend her harsh heart', *aspera . . . flectere corda*.⁹⁶ These words recall the traditional forms of love elegy, with its pictures of the excluded lover lying on his mistress' doorstep and addressing poems to her through a pseudonym. Stella himself is known to have been a poet who composed love elegies in the model of Catullus' poems to Lesbia. It seems, therefore, that Statius is here referring to real poems Stella had addressed to Violentilla, urging her (a widow) to yield to his suit. What is different from the world of Catullus, however, is that for Stella his public and private worlds can coalesce, his elegiac courtship ending in lawful matrimony, leading to a new form of 'elegiac conjugality'.⁹⁷

Statius' use of the tropes of elegiac courtship in his wedding song can be explained, in part, as a means to celebrate Stella's own poetic undertakings and, by focussing on Stella the poet rather than the office-holder, as a way to set Stella and Statius on an equal level.⁹⁸ Yet Stella and Statius do not seem to have been alone in viewing marital courtship in the terms of erotic love elegy. A letter of the Younger Pliny, addressed to his young wife Calpurnia, also expresses his yearning for her by comparing himself to the *amator exclusus* of love elegy: 'Sick and sad and as if shut out I withdraw

⁹¹ For an exploration of the links between painting and love elegy see Valladares 2006.

⁹² See discussions by Newlands 2002b: 88–105 and Alston and Spentzou 2011: 108–11.

⁹³ *Silvae* 1.2.174–81; on Stella see *PIR*² S1151, suffect consul in AD 102; White 1975: 267–72; A. Hardie 1983: 68.

⁹⁴ *Silvae* 1.2.229–35. ⁹⁵ *Silvae* 1.2.33–7. ⁹⁶ *Silvae* 1.2.194–200.

⁹⁷ The phrase is that of Alston and Spentzou 2011: 111. ⁹⁸ Newlands 2002b: 90–1.

from the empty threshold'.⁹⁹ Again poetic conventions from the world of erotic elegy are brought into the heart of Roman marriage, creating a new image of the conjugal relationship. Alston and Spentzou conclude:

Yet, as the elegiac ideal of the Augustan poets reversed the polarities of the traditional order, so the incorporation of that ideal into the Roman family, in the case of Pliny and Statius, questions and alters the relationship between the conjugal couple and the world. The development of an elegiac conjugality creates a new model of the conjugal couple and a new kind of social space in which the former can negotiate their relationship with the public.¹⁰⁰

Elsewhere Pliny presents a fairly conventional picture of his young, obedient wife, using this as part of his public persona.¹⁰¹ This suggests that for him the erotic tone of his yearning for his wife was not at odds with his public persona, but could be integrated into it. This seems to be the case with the use of erotic myths to comment on marriages too. The presentation of a couple in the guise of Selene and Endymion, or a deceased woman as Ariadne, has much in common with the visual parallels used in love elegy to depict the lover gazing at his beloved, as famously in Propertius 1.3. Yet its use in the context of an official marriage rather than an illicit entanglement suggests the extent to which a new erotics of conjugality was now at play, in which the erotic attachments that had previously been found primarily within the world of elegy could now be integrated and asserted as an integral part of Roman marriage. For some, we might see this focus on personal emotions and erotics as signalling a retreat from public life into the pleasures of the private sphere, but Pliny also cautions against this.¹⁰² For him, emotional yearning and erotic desire for his wife could be fully consistent with his picture of himself as a model, involved Roman citizen.

This appreciation of the ways in which erotic beauty and desirability could be celebrated alongside the more traditional Roman virtues in second- and third-century funerary monuments adds to our understanding of the dominance of erotic imagery in earlier domestic ensembles. From the mid-first century AD there seems to be a gradual reshaping of traditional Roman values, to integrate a new erotics of conjugality into the assertion of personal values and identities. It is interesting to note that this stress on erotics is more prevalent in the visual imagery than in written epitaphs. While some of these do acclaim the beauty of the deceased, as

⁹⁹ Pliny, *Letters* 7.5.1: *aeger et maestus ac similis excluso a vacuo limine recedo*.

¹⁰⁰ Alston and Spentzou 2011: 110–11.

¹⁰¹ See especially *Letters* 4.19.

¹⁰² Alston and Spentzou 2011: 124–31.

on an unusual epitaph proclaiming the virtues and beauties of one Allia Potestas (with legs to rival Atalanta's), the majority focus on more prosaic qualities.¹⁰³

An analysis of the epithets applied to those commemorated in funerary inscriptions has found that the majority are acclaimed as *bene merens* ('deserving'), while the epithets *dulcissimus/a* ('most sweet'), *carissimus/a* ('most dear') and *pientissimus/a* ('most dutifully affectionate') are next in popularity.¹⁰⁴ Patrons, spouses and foster children seem most likely to be referred to as *bene merens*, while children can be referred to as *dulcissimus* (especially for young children) or *pientissimus*. Although *dulcis* can be used with an erotic connotation in literature, it rarely appears applied to spouses on funerary inscriptions.¹⁰⁵ It would be interesting to know whether there is a chronological change in the types of epithets used in epigraphy, in parallel with that we find in the visual imagery, but I think that there is also a real distinction between the use of words and images. As we saw with the sarcophagus of Junius Euhodus and Metilia Acte (fig. 6.1), words can often be used to refer to the factual details of an individual's life, such as their public career, whereas the visual imagery introduces a more elevated, poetic tone, fleshing out the bare bones of an individual's virtues through comparison or allusion to a mythological model.

There may also be a division along gender lines. In Statius' *Silvae* mythological comparisons are used particularly to exalt women and boys, whereas mature men like Claudius Etruscus and Statius' own father are celebrated instead for their careers, though myths can offer consolation to their bereaved relatives.¹⁰⁶ In the senatorial tomb of the Sempronii, the myth of Ariadne was seen as a suitable choice to commemorate a daughter (fig. 6.12), whereas the father and mother were probably interred in a hunt and Muse sarcophagus respectively.¹⁰⁷ In some cases, however, both members of a married couple might later be interred within a sarcophagus, and the imagery reflected back upon them both, as we will see below.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ CE 1988; CIL VI.37965; CLE 1988; Lattimore 1942: 298–9. On this epitaph see Horsfall 1985; also Mayer 2012: 150–2.

¹⁰⁴ Sigismund Nielsen 1997. For discussion of sentiments of grief and loss on funerary epitaphs see also Carroll 2006: 196–202.

¹⁰⁵ Sigismund Nielsen 1997: 191.

¹⁰⁶ Statius, *Silvae* 2.1.112–13, 137–45; 2.6.25–33; 5.1.57–9 cf. 3.3.63–110; 5.3.74–9, 116–208. For a reading of mythological sarcophagi through Statius' consolations see Newby 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Borg 2013: 126–30.

¹⁰⁸ On the question of multiple burials see Birk 2013: 22–31; Borg 2013: 203–6; Galinier 2013: 97–100.

The Return of *Romanitas*? Mars and Rhea Silvia on Roman Sarcophagi

As we have seen, the themes of Roman mythological sarcophagi are overwhelmingly taken from the corpus of Greek myth, with very few examples showing Roman historical legends, despite the fact that the stories such as those of Cloelia or Horatius could have served equally well to assert the virtues of the deceased. Apart from a couple of sarcophagi showing events from the story of Aeneas, which appear to have been special commissions, there is also one group of sarcophagi that is particularly interesting for its representation of a founding scene from Roman myth-history within the iconography elsewhere used for Greek myth.¹⁰⁹ This is the small group of Mars and Rhea Silvia sarcophagi that emerges at the turn of the second to third centuries AD.¹¹⁰

One sarcophagus in the Vatican pairs the myth of Mars and Rhea Silvia with that of Selene and Endymion, presenting the two myths as typologically equivalent (fig. 7.2).¹¹¹ Both divine figures approach reclining figures of the opposite sex, whose bodily charms are revealed by helpful Erotes. The heads of Selene and Endymion are both restored, but the heads of Mars and Rhea Silvia survive and show portrait faces of the early third century. The man's portrait is characteristic of portraits of Caracalla, while the woman's is younger and sports a hairstyle popular some ten to fifteen years earlier. Perhaps the sarcophagus was commissioned by a man to commemorate himself and a wife who had died some years earlier, though it is also possible that the wife continued to wear a hairstyle popular some years previously.¹¹² The other sarcophagi of this type focus just on Mars and Rhea Silvia and, where we can tell, they all featured portrait faces.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ A particularly interesting example featuring Aeneas is the sarcophagus from Grottarossa in the Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 168186, showing Dido and Aeneas' hunting trip at the left (Vergil, *Aeneid* 4.130–56) accompanied by the figure of Iulus/Ascanius taking part in the hunt to the right, which contained the mummified body of an eight-year-old girl. Bibliography: Giuliano 1979: 318–24, no. 190 (M. Sapelli); Bordenache Battaglia 1983: 100–23; Ascenzi et al. 1996; Grassinger 1999: 91–8, 222, cat. 68; Galinier 2013: 101–7. There is also a sarcophagus with the rape of the Sabine women in Cornell Museum of Fine Arts, and a few sarcophagi featuring Romulus and Remus and the she-wolf; see Dardenay 2010: 183–4 and Huskinson 2015: 157.

¹¹⁰ Robert 1904: 227–37.

¹¹¹ Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Profano inv. 9558. Sichtermann 1992: no. 99; Newby 2011: 209–10.

¹¹² See Fittschen 1984: 160 n. 47a on the dating of the portraits. ¹¹³ Newby 2011: 209–13.



Figure 7.2 Sarcophagus with the myths of Mars and Rhea Silvia, and Selene and Endymion. Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Profano inv. 9558.

The close visual similarities between the Mars and Rhea Silvia and the Selene and Endymion sarcophagi suggest that they were seen as presenting the same range of funerary messages for the deceased and bereaved.¹¹⁴ The sleeping figure can be read as a euphemism for the endless sleep of the dead, suggesting that like them, the deceased rests eternally in a pastoral realm. The visitation of their loved one suggests the desire for a reunion after death, in a similar manner to that suggested in some epitaphs. Despite the similarities between Endymion and Ariadne sarcophagi in their presentation of eternal sleep, figures of Dionysus approaching Ariadne are never given portrait features, suggesting that most Roman men did not want to associate themselves on their funerary monument with this rather effete god. However, the god Mars was a most appropriate god with which to identify oneself, embodying both military prowess and the fatherhood of the Roman race.

Yet this myth was also cast in the model of the erotic union between Selene and Endymion, placing the wife as an object of erotic beauty and allure. By refashioning Roman myth in Greek guise, the Roman patron could satisfy both his public and his private persona, presenting himself as a man of military bearing and patriotism, yet also asserting the erotic conjugality which bound him to his wife, in a manner similar to that of the younger Pliny, as discussed above. An early example of the presence of Mars and Rhea Silvia on a sarcophagus can be seen on a sarcophagus in the Museo Nazionale Romano, dated to around AD 190

¹¹⁴ See Koortbojian 1995: 127–41 for a discussion of the uses of typological correspondences on sarcophagi.

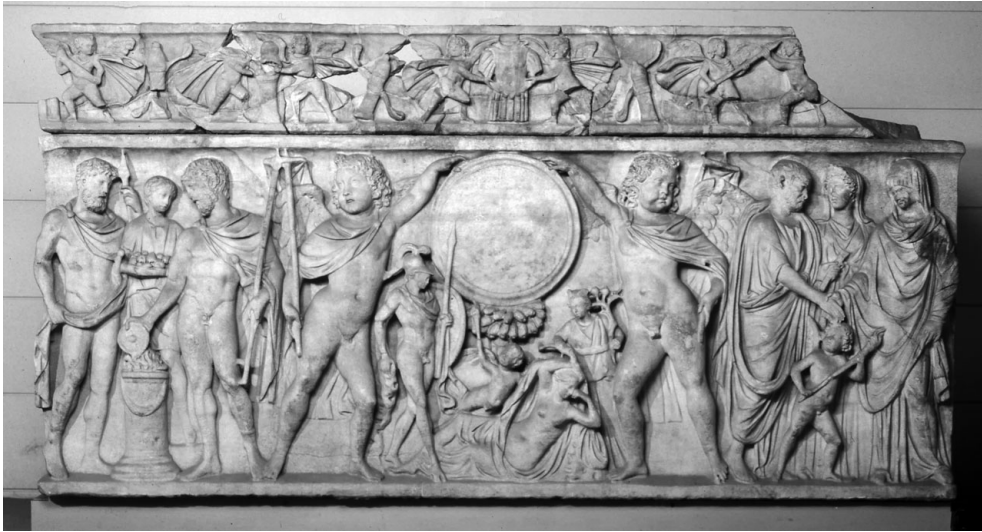


Figure 7.3 Shield sarcophagus with a central vignette showing Mars and Rhea Silvia. Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 310683.

(fig. 7.3).¹¹⁵ This juxtaposes the myth with scenes taken from the iconography of *Vita Romana* sarcophagi. The centre of the sarcophagus shows two Erotes holding up a shield, with the group of Mars and Rhea Silvia shown beneath. To the left a scene of sacrifice suggests the virtue of *pietas*, while to the right the deceased couple is shown clasping hands in a scene of marital *concordia*. Here the mythological vignette adds an extra resonance to the deceased's public persona, but does not replace it. The later sarcophagi that make the myth their main theme define the union between man and wife purely in mythological terms, equating the man with Mars, and the woman with Rhea Silvia. For the patrons of these sarcophagi, the statement they could give of the deceased's Roman heritage does indeed seem important, but this Roman identity is also presented within the elevated and erotic tone previously established by Greek myth. Here, Greek myths and values combine with Roman needs and senses of identity to produce a new melding of prototypes in which the old staples of the Roman canon could be reshaped for a new society.

In the Augustan age we can see a stricter division between the forms of behaviour and values appropriate in different settings, with fantasy, myth and luxury located in the sphere of *otium* and the elite villa, and more

¹¹⁵ Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 310683; Giuliano 1995: 122–32, no. 83; Reinsberg 2006: no. 89; Stilp 2013: 58.

public, traditionally Roman values within the public sphere.¹¹⁶ Myth here is primarily associated with *otium* and private values; it can be used to illustrate the erotic fantasies of the poets, or to enhance the experience of a luxurious *cena*. When it appears in the public arena, myth is primarily used to assert negative *exempla*, warning of the perils that befall those who dare to challenge the gods. By the end of the first century AD, however, the division between *otium* and *negotium* seems to be breaking down, with the values traditionally associated with *otium* spilling out into a wider arena. When the marriage of a senator can be expressed in the terms of love elegy, myth too moves from the world of fantasy into reality, to serve the self-representation of the deceased, or to ponder on the roles appropriate for a Roman *matrona* or *pater familias*. The old Roman values of *virtus*, *pietas* and *concordia* are not lost, but reshaped and represented in a new form of imagery.

The reasons for these social shifts are likely to be many. One key strand is the use of imagery previously associated with the erotic sphere for more public forms of conjugal self-representation. Greek myth offered more examples of such erotic unions than Roman history did, with its traditional association with more Stoic values of patriotism. However, the use of Greek myth cannot be explained alone by a reshaping of values, for it was also used to express more traditional Roman values such as dutiful affection of a wife for her husband (Alcestis), or the manly virtue exemplified in scenes of heroes hunting. For both of these there were other possibilities available. Roman history had plenty of examples of loyal and virtuous wives, and the manly virtues of hunting could have been expressed through scenes of the deceased engaged in a contemporary, rather than mythological, hunt. Yet this did not happen, and even when hunt sarcophagi take over from the mythological versions in the third century they draw their iconography largely from the world of imperial lion hunts, rather than the more customary practice of boar hunts.¹¹⁷ This suggests that there was a desire to use a different realm of expression to increase the impact of the message. Myth helped to elevate the message, in the same way that borrowings from imperial iconography elevate the later lion-hunt sarcophagi.

Greek myth provided a language that was accessible to all at a basic level but could also give access to an elevated world of the intellect and imagination. Its ubiquity in classical literature shows that all those with even a modicum of education could be expected to know the various

¹¹⁶ See Wallace-Hadrill 2008a: 38–70.

¹¹⁷ See Andreae 1980.

myths, while the complex allusions and contested versions of the myths also show the ability for myth to act as a stage for the display of more erudite knowledge. Its associations with poetry also gave myth an elevating effect, raising the concerns it dealt with into the poetic sphere, and allowing everyday cares and concerns to be discussed in a universalising way.

In the course of this book we have seen how mythological images develop from objects of booty, expressive of the power of Roman conquest, to become an integral part of the creation and expression of new forms of Roman values and identities. This change seems to be due to a number of factors. It relates to the gradual reshaping of social and political life that accompanied the change from Republic to Empire, especially as manifested in a new focus on domestic and familial concerns. Yet it also reflects the changing nature of Roman society, from an aristocracy dominated by old Italian families to a multi-ethnic senate, and from a capital that could define itself in terms of its own history and past to one that increasingly absorbed the cultures and ideals of its wider empire. As society at Rome changed, there was a need for a new common vocabulary. The universality of the Greek myths made them the ideal vehicles to express and debate these changing forms of Roman values and identities.

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